

3 いえ、それは**爆発**します

これは
ゾンビ
ですか？

木村心一

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ファンタジア文庫



Kore wa Zombie Desu ka? Volume 3: No, That Explodes

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Kore wa
Zombie
Desuka?

◀Tomonori

Chronicle
of Ayumu's
Battle for the
Bathtub

Ayumu: Alrighty, let's take a bath...

Tomonori: Uwaaaaah! Aikawa! Wha-I Gya-I Tcha-I

Ayumu: Tomonori... what are you doing?

Tomonori: Don't you remember?! I already told you that our bathtub back home is broken, so I was coming over to use your hot water!

Ayumu: Oh, right. Well, wanna take a bath together?

Tomonori: Don't screw with me! You're just treating me like a boy, aren't you?!

Ayumu: I promise I won't do anything, kay?

Tomonori: You won't do anything? ..But at least you should... use your hands to..... wash your body.

Ayumu: That was the punchline?! Alright, I'm coming in with you!

Tomonori: After all, I'm Aikawa's wife..... Ugh! Nevermind, I just can't! Get out!







Yuu ▶

Ayumu: Alright, let's try again then...

Haruna: You wanna be made into the soy sauce I use with my dumplings?!

Yuu: I will! unleash all the stretch power you have stored in your legs. (1)

Haruna: T-That's so extreme! Don't do that!

Ayumu: Geez... so the bathtub is occupied again. What are you two arguing about?

Haruna: Ayumu, listen to this! I'm trying to clean the tub and she's getting in the way!

Yuu: Haruna is trying to clean the bathtub with shampoo.

Ayumu: Don't tell me... Haruna, did you always use shampoo...?

Haruna: Huh? Wouldn't that make this bathtub into the envy of the world?

Yuu: We should remove Haruna from the bathtub cleaning rotation list.

Ayumu: Yeah, that's true. Alright, Yuu, shall we clean the bathtub together then?

Yuu: Why is Ayumu giving me a dirty look?

(1) Reference to Stretch Man, a bizarre Japanese "superhero" that taught people how to stretch and used the power of stretching to defeat enemies.



SERA ▶

Ayumu: Once again... once again, I'm going to try o take a bath... ah.

Sera: Ah.

Ayumu: H.... Nice breasts you got there.

Sera: I didn't hear that too well, so please go die.

Ayumu: Wait... hold on, Sera. Just listen. The one who sees red and gets excited is not the bull. It's the audience. The bullfighter and the bull both have to remain calm. Just calm down.

Sera: Who....

Ayumu: Ugh, I give up. I'm going to a public bath. See ya.

Sera: Who are you calling a bull?!

Ayumu: I'm sorry...! I'm sorry!!!

When will Ayumu ever be able to take a bath? Well, you'll find out if you keep reading this volume!

Prologue – K-Kyah- Haruna-san is Such a Perv~~~



Prologue

I had been soaking in the bathtub for around twenty minutes.

Getting into the tub when the sun was up sure made me feel spoiled.

But ever since those people moved in, I could never take a bath when I wanted to.

All right, how about I stay and stew in this tub today, like a nice piece of pork in a slow cooker?

But whenever I took a bath like this, my mind started turning to various things.

Kyouko, who murdered me. The King of the Night, who pulled the

strings. Dai-sensei, who chased after them.

And then, the girl who had turned me into a zombie, Yuu.

Yuu had left after apologizing for causing us trouble, and only a few days had passed since then. But the situation hadn't really changed. The fake Megalo created by the King of the Night were still frequently appearing.

The news suggested that not many people had realized what was going on yet, so it seemed that the demon-exterminating vampire ninjas and the Megalo-hunting masou shoujo were doing a pretty good job.

“Ugh... So tired...”

I heard a sluggish female voice approaching me. This voice was... It was definitely Haruna. So she had come back from the magical world Virie?

I could see a small, Haruna-like “aho-shadow” on the other side of the frosted glass. By the way, by “aho-shadow,” I meant the shadow of the aho-like tuft of hair that stuck out of the top of her head.

I heard the rustling sound of clothes. From how her aho-shadow was moving... I gathered that she was tossing her skirt into the laundry hamper.

Haruna had gone to Virie to gather information for me. She had grumbled quite a bit about not wanting to go to school, but I had begged her to do something for me just this once, and she had finally gone off to her school in Virie. I really wanted to know if she had been able to learn anything useful, but I couldn't call out to her.

If I called out, she would probably just start yelling at me. And she should have been able to guess that I was here in the bath, since I had laid out my change of clothes in the changing room. However...

“Ah, but let's heat up a bath.”

And Haruna opened the damn door without realizing I was inside.

Haruna, what hast thou done?! Yes, I was so shaken that I began talking funny.¹

But of course I was shaken. Even if I was a zombie, I didn't want to be seen naked! ...Even if it was okay for people to see my innards.

“Hyah~!” Haruna gave out a small, short shriek. And then she stood rooted to the spot, unable to move.

But first, I tried to do something about this chilling atmosphere, covering my chest with my hands.

“-K-Kyah-. Haruna-san is Such a Perv~~~”

The situation demanded it, so I let out a forced yell, almost as if I was reading some script from a school's art festival.

“...”

“...”

“Ayumu, what are you doing?”

Haruna's huge eyes narrowed. Her half-removed white blouse was quite cute.

“Even if you ask me that... Well, I'm taking a bath.”

“Don't I always tell you to never get in before me?! Get out!”

Her lips thinned into a frown and her chestnut-colored ahoge bounced from side to side.

How unreasonable. And she sure was pretty cheeky for someone freeloading off me.

“You too, go back to Virie and take a bath there or something!”

“Shut up! Idiot! Don't tell me to go back!”

Haruna, seeming pretty energetic in her white blouse and polka-

dotted panties, threw her towel at me.

“It was obviously a joke! Hey, come on! Sto-“

“Hentai! Hentai! Hentai!”

Haruna completely ignored me, throwing the skirt she had just taken off and some laundry detergent at me. Normally, wouldn't things be thrown *from* the bath instead of the other way around?

“More importantly, Haruna! Did you learn anything?”

Haruna had hoisted up the laundry hamper, but her expression suddenly darkened and she looked away from me.

I hadn't hoped for much, but it was clear she hadn't learned much at all.

“My only friends are love and courage.”

Haruna mumbled out words that I might have expected to hear from Sweetened Bun Man.²

Haruna was very selfish and proud, and that might be why she had no friends back in her home world of Virie. Well, rather, there wasn't anyone she could call a friend other than Dai-sensei.

So there really wasn't a reason to expect that someone like Haruna would be able to ask anybody over there for information.

And yet, I thought that there might be a chance she could learn something useful, so I sent her out on this task, but... Ugh, I guess it didn't really go too well.

“Did you ask Els-san or any of the teachers other than Dai-sensei?”

“Those people are useless. They're completely out of touch. We have a duty to make reports to them, but they never report any concrete details back to us. They should seriously just go die.”

Although it was probably Haruna's attitude that made them reluctant to pass information to her. Even though schools were

places where information circulated pretty easily...

“Well, there’s no helping that. But there’s one thing I’d like to correct...”

“What?”

“Your only friends aren’t love and courage. Sera and Yuu, and me, and maybe even Orito, we’re your friends too.”

Whether she was happy or not, Haruna flushed a deep red and a complicated expression rose to her face.

“I never remembered... making you all my friends, though.”

“Friends are not something you decide to ‘make’ someone into.”

Indeed. They just suddenly become like that when you aren’t paying attention. That was what friendship was all about.

I wanted to say that out loud, but I couldn’t manage it.

“What kind of bizarre phenomenon is that... Plus, being friends with Ayumu is just a bit...”

Ah, suddenly I felt a bit offended.

“I see. Why haven’t you closed the door already? You hentai.”

“Wha-?! What’s wrong with you?! You erobakka!”

Don’t you mean erogappa?³ Why are you going and randomly upgrading the insult?

Haruna quickly left the changing room, and I sunk into the tub until the water almost reached my eyes.

Fuu... Should I get out?

It was no longer pleasant to be in the bath. Geez... who did she think was going to clean up after her? I tidied up the things that Haruna had thrown around, roughly toweled my face off, and was about to go back to my room when I stopped in my house’s

entranceway.

A chainsaw was leaning against the wall there.

That was the masou renki that Haruna needed to transform into a masou shoujo.⁴

Standing there, it almost looked like a shoehorn... Except not really.⁵

And in the umbrella stand were two Japanese katanas.

Standing there, they almost looked like umbrellas... Except not really.

They didn't even have scabbards, and their blades were exposed like they were kitchen knives. Those two katanas were the masou renki of Haruna's frighteningly strong homeroom teacher. I wonder if Dai-sensei was safe? She didn't seem to be the type to be easily killed, but she didn't have her masou renki, so... *Sigh*.

I had expected Haruna to at least try and take care of these swords a bit more, but then this happened. Well, they did seem like they would be useful in warding off demons like that, so it was fine, but if Dai-sensei found them like this she would probably be shocked.

I was staring at those two swords earnestly when the front door opened.

A woman with black hair, the kind that would make people all over the world jealous, leapt into the room.

"Sera?"

I caught Sera as she leapt right at me. She would usually brush me aside as if I was some vermin stuck to her shirt, but today she did no such thing.

Rather, she couldn't.

I had just gotten out of the bath, but I saw sticky, red blood stuck to my hand.

Blood was gushing from Sera's body, and not only from one place. It flowed from her slim abdomen, from her thin shoulders, from her luscious breasts... Everything was dyed in red.

Any normal human with those wounds would have died instantly. She was a vampire ninja, so even those seemingly fatal wounds wouldn't kill her, but losing all that blood couldn't be good.

"Haruna!!" I called out so loudly that I was afraid I would disturb our neighbors.

On the second floor, Haruna seemed pretty displeased to have me call her, and poked only her head out.

"What the hell do you want, hentai?" After she insulted me, her eyes opened wide as she saw Sera, and she almost tumbled down the stairs.

"Ayumu! What the hell are you doing?! Apply first aid!"

"A-Ahh..." But even if she said that, it's not like I knew much about first aid. I was a zombie, so I always left my wounds as they were. But there was no time for excuses. For now, I had to focus on stopping the bleeding.

This... and that... and this. How did this go now? Ugh, dammit! I really wished I had taken a first aid class. I had no idea what to do.

"Sera-"

"Ugh, dammit! Out of the way!"

Haruna brushed me aside and began to administer first aid to Sera.

"It's no use! What the hell is this?! The blood isn't stopping at all!"

Haruna's t-shirt became soaked in blood as she tried to stop the bleeding, and all I could do was watch.

"I need... more blood."

"Haruna, give her some blood."

Just as their name implied, vampire ninjas sucked other people's blood. If they did that, they could heal wounds just like zombies could. But Haruna didn't seem too pleased.

"Eh? I have to... do that again?"

"Please. That's the best way to deal with this."

".....If that's..... the only way....."

Haruna looked resigned, and she locked lips with Sera.

If we weren't in a tense situation, then I would have grinned and made some inane comment, but there was a reason that was happening, so I kept my mouth shut and just stared at that scene silently.

Haruna's eyes opened in surprise, and Sera bit into her neck.

"Nya-!"

Haruna's cheeks were flushed red as she yelled out.

"Wha... No... This is..."

Haruna gripped Sera by the shoulders and tried to get her off, but there was no strength in her fingers.

"No... I don't want..... H-Help me."

Haruna's eyes were glazed over as she grabbed my clothes. She had resolved herself to sharing her blood, but in the end, it seemed that she didn't want to.

"Haruna, please... Let her."

"Gngngggg... I-I guess there's... there's no other way..."

Red blood trickled down from the edges of Sera's bewitching lips. She must have been really thirsty.

That spectacle continued for quite a few seconds. Haruna seemed to lose strength and collapsed while Sera stood up and wiped her

mouth, her eyes gleaming red.

“Thank you very much. You saved my life.”

Hadn't she looked like she was on the edge of death just a second ago? As expected of a vampire ninja. Just sucking blood was enough to return them to such good health.

“I'm... never doing that again, all right...?”

Haruna's shoulders were heaving as she breathed heavily and looked up at Sera.

“I apologize.”

“Haruna, are you all right?”

“Y-yeah. Just a bit faint from the blood loss.”

Haruna was flushed red from ear to ear, and she held her neck with one hand.

“So, Sera. What happened? To think that you could be done in like this... Don't tell me... This was Kyouko's doing?”

“No... These wounds were...”

Sera gripped her red-stained shirt, and showed me a lonely-looking expression I was not used to seeing from her.

“... I'm going to go change.”

Sera quickly stood up, but I pointed towards the bathroom with a befuddled look on my face.

“The bath... It's heated already, if you want.”

She should get all that blood washed off. It didn't make me happy to see girls drenched in blood. I was a zombie, not a vampire ninja.

“I see. Then I will gladly take a bath.”

She spoke with a commanding tone, as if nothing had happened.

Sera then headed for the bathroom, limping a bit.

Sera had been checking on the movement patterns of the fake Megalo for me.

After all, if we wanted to find Kyouko, the easiest way was to look for the fake Megalo she was creating.

I had told her not to fight the Megalo even if she found some, but... It looked like she had pushed herself too hard.

It seemed Haruna had returned to her own room on the second floor. I went to the kitchen to grab some barley tea from the refrigerator and brought it, along with two teacups, to the living room. Then I watched television while I waited for Sera.

After around half an hour, Sera came to the living room with her hair out of her usual ponytail. I passed her one of the teacups filled with tea.

“So, what happened?”

“While I was soaking in the bathtub, I desperately thought about how I could lie to you about this. However, I do not know how to lie, so I will tell you the truth.”

After that incredibly ominous introduction, Sera spoke with a serious expression.

“The one who attacked me was a vampire ninja in the same conservative faction as myself. A vampire ninja... A fellow vampire ninja attacked me.”

“Why?” I couldn’t say anything else. These vampire ninjas really did things sometimes that were just completely beyond my comprehension.

“Because I had defied my orders.”

“When they told you to kill Yuu?”

Sera had received an order to kill Yuu. She had defied those orders,

and now her life was in danger?

“To vampire ninjas, the orders we are given take priority over everything. Even I would want to kill those who defy their orders.”

“... If you understood that, then why did you make a report?”

“What do you mean?”

“Wouldn’t it have worked out if you just never said anything? If you didn’t tell them that you disobeyed orders, then they wouldn’t be after your life either, right? Just accept the mission but don’t act on it. Wouldn’t that work?”

“...Yes.”

“.....Am I right?”

“I never thought about it that way.”

Ah, so it’s not that she just couldn’t tell lies, but she also wasn’t able to hide the truth.

“Although that’s one of your good traits.”

“In any case. I can no longer act as a vampire ninja. I humbly apologize.”

Sera lowered her head. Seeing her looking up at me with upturned eyes like that, I had to say that she looked more cute than pretty.

“Nah, it’s not like you could have done anything about that...”

“But onto another topic...”

Her sharp jade eyes stared right at me. Sera drank just a bit of the barley tea.

“Hm?”

“Have you thought of exactly why Hellsythe-dono would leave us?”

Why she would leave us? Well, Yuu showing emotions was enough to cause bad things to happen to the people around her. That's why she was always emotionless, and that's why she left, so as to avoid any negative impact on us. Right? Sera should also have known that Yuu was a nice girl. She should have also known that Yuu was afraid of hurting others with her own powers. So why was she bringing this up...?

"Do you think we were the ones who caused her to leave then?"

"Yes... I have a feeling that Hellscythe-dono left because of us. But I still just cannot figure out the reason why. So I wanted to ask you for your opinion."

"Well... It's not like I know either."

However... There must have been a reason. A reason that Yuu had left. Well, I was already pretty convinced that she just couldn't stay with us anymore.

But Yuu was the only person with the answer to that question...
Dammit.

"By the way, was the temperature of the bath all right? I was in there for pretty long, so the bath might have cooled a bit."

"...Are you telling me that you made me take a bath in water that you had already used?"

In a hundred-eighty-degree turn, I suddenly felt as if I was being stared down from the top of Mount Everest. Rather than pretty, I had to say she looked more like... Well, like a demon.

... Why exactly did I tell her that when I knew it was going to end up like this?

END PROLOGUE

Chapter 1 – Yes. To Make Gyoza Skin, You Have to Spin the Potter's Wheel Like This... and Then Oh My, How Strange.



Part 1

“We’re treasure hunters at heart, you know!”

Orito’s eyeglasses shone as he was tightly gripped his fists. Not because he wanted to punch someone... Rather, he was gripping his fists in fiery passion.

Usually, I would just ignore him, but this time I nodded and agreed with him, a meek expression on my face.

“I agree. There doesn’t exist a man who feels no heat in his chest after discovering treasure.”

“However, you also can’t go so far as to actually become a treasure hunter!”

“Ahh, yeah. Theft is a crime, after all.”

“Yo, Aikawa~~! Whatcha talkin’ about?”

A girl with short hair appeared with her hands behind her head. She seemed like the type of person who always smiled, and though she was a girl, she looked more like a lively, active young boy. She put both her hands on her waist and made herself look imposing. “Hm? Hm?” She seemed very interested in what was going on, her large eyes becoming even larger as she looked back and forth between Orito and me.

“Tomonori, you’re also a guy. Doesn’t your heart just leap when you see something pretty?”

“Hm, well. I’m actually **A GIRL**, but yeah, my heart would definitely leap.”

“Orito, it’s a waste of time to ask her for her opinion.”

When I said that, Tomonori’s expression clouded.

“Don’t say it like thaaat~~. That just makes me feel sad. Let me in on it toooo~~.”

Tomonori gripped me by the shoulders and began to energetically shake my upper body. Geez... She probably wouldn’t understand, but I sighed and spoke with a listless voice.

“Well then, Tomonori. Which excites you more: a treasure you found by accident, or a treasure that you dug up yourself?”

“Huh? Hmm, for me... I guess it would be the treasure I found by accident. You’re not looking for it, but you suddenly see it and you’re like, ‘uwoohh!!’”

“Oh? That’s quite surprising.”

I was honestly impressed. Normal people would have chosen the

treasure that they had dug up.

“See? Aikawa, she’s obviously the same as we are.”

“It sure seems so. Tomonori, I underestimated you.”

Orito and I both crossed our arms and nodded knowingly. Tomonori put a hand on top of her head and smiled.

“Ahaha, you don’t have to praise me so much...”

“Orito. With this, our theory that sudden panty shots and nipple slips are so exciting precisely because they are accidental becomes even more certain!”

“... Huh?”

“Indeed. To think that a girl like Tomonori would appreciate the sublime nature of a sudden panty shot. Are we sure she isn’t really a boy?”

“... What?”

Orito and I shared a laugh. We wore smiles as crisp as the summer sky, while Tomonori gave us a smile as dry as a desert.

“Y-You two... You seriously are huge hentai!”

“Hey Tomonori, what in the world are you saying?”

“Yes, Tomonori. That’s something that someone who’s never seen a true hentai would say.”

“Ugh! What are you two talking about?! Let’s talk about something more wholesome! More wholesome!”

Tomonori ran her hands roughly through her hair and tried to search for another topic of discussion.

“Well, we’re talking about how there’s no man who doesn’t love the sight of panties.”

Faced with Tomonori’s ignorance, Orito put up his hands and shook

his head disappointingly.

“Indeed. There is nothing more wholesome than this.”

I crossed my arms and nodded happily.

“... Do you really want to see panties so badly?”

Tomonori’s eyes were expressionless as she put her hands on her hips. It seemed that she had given up on changing the topic.

“Yeah, we do.”

“Of course we want to see them.”

“... Then, shall I show you some?”

Tomonori gave us a bold smile, grabbed her skirt, and pulled it up a bit as if prepared to show us what was underneath.

“Nah, we’re good.”

“Huh?”

She seemed really surprised by how quickly I answered. But she really didn’t understand. What was the fun in seeing panties that were so readily and shamelessly shown to us? Rather, it was when girls had their panties show accidentally, when they were really embarrassed about it, that their cuteness really gleamed brighter than a diamond.

We really weren’t that desperate.

All right, it was time to spend the next thirty minutes explaining that to her.

“Were you even listening before? When we said that things are more exciting when they’re accidental...”

Orito, don’t you agree? As I explained to Tomonori how powerful accidental panty shots were, I quickly glanced in Orito’s direction.

“Tomonori-sama! Please show us lowly mongrels your compassion!”

...Orito, were you really that desperate? Orito's eyes watered inside his glasses, reminding me of a Chihuahua, and he clung to Tomonori's arms like a koala.

"Hey! Gedoff! ...That was obviously a joke! Who the hell would show you?! Uwaah! Don't grab me there!"

"Don't they say that men never go back on their word?!"

"I'm not a man, and I don't remember ever saying something like that!"

"It's fine, just show us! Come on!"

Orito began to lift up Tomonori's skirt.

"Why do you want to see them so badly?!"

"They are no less than a precious jewel! I'll burn the sight into my mind, and carry it with me every day!"

"Don't carry that with you!"⁶

At that moment, Tomonori let loose what looked to be a corkscrew punch. Her fist came swinging down onto the tippy top of Orito's spiky head.

When I took a closer look, I saw that her middle knuckle jutted out a bit from the rest of her fist. That was... Was that a caltrop?!

⁷

Orito collapsed on top of the desk, and even if someone counted to ten, he showed no signs of getting back up.

As expected from Tomonori-san! She didn't even go easy on humans! How dirty, ninjas fought so dirty!

"Humans are such greedy creatures. They ask for more than they need, and are just wretched, lonely animals..."

And thus, my retelling was brought forcefully to a close. After all, after Orito was beaten black and blue, nothing really happened that was worth mentioning.

Now then, maybe I should sit down and actually eat my lunch properly.

Part 2

School ended, but almost like the sun in Super Mario 3, the sun outside didn't seem to want to set. It would probably still be some time before I could move around freely outside.

Lately, I usually went to school during the daytime and hunted for Yuu and the fake Megalo during the nighttime.

However, not only did we have no clues as to what was going on, but we couldn't even find a single Megalo. And perhaps the incident with Sera had bad effects, because I couldn't get any information out of the vampire ninjas at school either.

Sigh... Maybe Yuu really had gone back to the Underworld... I felt like I would go and find her, no matter where she was, but... I just didn't know where she was.

I felt a part deep within me that wanted to give up. It was a part of me that had existed in my mind for as long as I could remember. But there was also a part of me that screamed that there had to be a solution. That part had sprung up inside me quite recently. It was as if there was a constant itching in my heart... It really made me feel sick.

To prepare for the long ordeal of waiting for the sun to set, I had sent Orito to the convenience store. He had brought back some salmon onigiri, and we chitchatted animatedly as we stuffed our faces with the onigiri.⁸

The other two surrounded me: Orito sat in the seat in front of me, while Tomonori had brought a chair over from the side.

I had already become quite used to spending time like this.

Orito headed off for the bathroom, and the conversation momentarily ceased. At that moment, Tomonori started becoming

awfully fidgety.

“So you need to go to the bathroom too?”

“N-no! You idiot!” Tomonori raised a fist overhead. However, she soon dropped that fist and took something out from her bag.

“Aikawa... Take this.”

“Hm? Tickets?”

“Aikawa... D-do you want to go with me to the planetarium?”

“Planetarium? They actually sell those tickets in advance?”

“I worked hard to get these tickets, ya know.”

Tomonori gave me a quick thumbs up, and I thought she looked a bit cute doing that. How should I put it... Compared to her usual easygoing personality, she really seemed more ladylike here.

Hmm... I never knew she liked romantic things like this.

“Outer space! It’s reaaaaaally something!”

Tomonori clasped her hands together, as if she was praying, and looked out the window with eyes that glittered like the stars. Those eyes almost looked like the eyes of a young boy in love.

Well, I thought outer space was pretty amazing too, but... There were definitely plenty of other places we could go to have fun.

There were two tickets. I guess I couldn’t invite Haruna or Sera.

Orito came back from the bathroom, so Tomonori started to explain the virtues of planetariums once again.

“Oh? What are those? Tickets to a Giants-Dragons game?!”⁹

I’m not sure if there’s a good way to describe the look on Tomonori’s face at that moment. All I could say was that it was a complicated expression.

Orito snatched the tickets from my hand.

“Planetarium? You like that kind of stuff? That’s weird for someone on the track team.”

When Orito sent Tomonori a teasing look, Tomonori’s expression turned murderous. He sure was quick to figure out that those tickets were Tomonori’s and not mine. Well, he probably knew that I wouldn’t go to a place like that.

“Outer space!! It’s reaaaaaaaaaaaaally amazing!!”

Tomonori tossed up both her arms and shouted loudly, but Orito ignored her and just waved the tickets back and forth. Tomonori desperately tried to get the tickets back, but because of their height difference, all she could do was hop up and down in vain.

“Aikawa, let’s go together!”

“If it means going with you, I’d rather just go alone.”

I took the tickets back from Orito and returned them to Tomonori.

“Come on, let’s go together. If you do, I swear I’ll never ask you for anything again!”

Tomonori clasped both her hands together and begged. It was hard to refuse her when she acted like that, but... Why was she so desperate?

Orito seemed to be thinking the same thing. He cocked his head to the side and ran a finger through his spiky hair.

“Hey Tomonori, why are you so desperate?”

Tomonori looked away from me. She untwined her fingers and touched her fingertips together, looking quite fidgety.

“I mean... Summer break is coming up...”

Tomonori barely moved her mouth as she mumbled. I was really surprised by how cute she looked.

“Can’t you just go during summer break? You an idiot?”

Orito shrugged his shoulders and laughed through his nose.

“Well, that’s... I took retests on my exams, and... I did worse than I did the first time.”

”Teehee. Silly me,” she seemed to be saying apologetically. Normally, you would do better on the retest...

“What kinds of scores did you get?”

“Well, on all subjects..... I scored a minus two.”

”How the hell do you get a negative score?!”

Orito and I were completely in synch when we shouted that. All right, even allowing for the very faint possibility that she scored a negative score on one subject, it must have been damn hard work for her to actually do that on every subject!

“No, no, it’s just that I accidentally wrote ‘Mael Strom’ for my name.”

Her vampire ninja name, huh? Well, that was her real name, so I couldn’t blame... No, that was definitely her fault! She should have been more careful!

“What the hell is that? English?”

Orito bopped Tomonori on the head.

“A-anyways! I don’t have a summer break anymore! So I won’t be able to meet with Aikawa anymore either.”

“Then invite me, Tomonori! Why?! Why does it have to be Aikawa?!”

“Because I’m Aikawa’s wi-“ “All right, Tomonori, let’s go tomorrow!”

I promptly interrupted. She was just about to say that she was my

wife, wasn't she? I was certain that we had gotten over that already and were just friends now, but she still seemed set on calling herself my wife.

"Really?! You'll go with me?! Aikawa sure is a nice guy~~. Nobody would go to the planetarium with me before."

Well, I guess it could be a good distraction. If it could do something about this hazy unrest in my chest, then maybe...

"Tomonori! Invite me too! Why?!?! Why does it have to be Aikawa?!?!"

I could see waterfalls of tears fall from behind Orito's glasses. Orito held out his hands towards Tomonori.

"Well, I really don't want to walk around alone with Orito."

Tomonori brushed away Orito's hands and her lips thinned. She turned away from Orito.

"Ahh, that hurt."

As if hit by the Break spell from FF4, Orito stood there petrified. Perhaps she took pity on him, but Tomonori turned back to face him. I also felt quite a bit of pity for him.

"I mean, there are rumors that you always try to fling your arms around girls' waists..."

Yup. There was no getting out of that.

"That's a good thing! Don't girls want to be touched on dates?!"

"That's why I don't want to go with you! I don't want to walk around with someone who thinks gross things like that!"

"Huh? Gross? You being seriously serious about that?"¹⁰

Orito gave me his puppy-eyes look as he pleaded with me to agree with him.

“First off, I can feel myself grow murderous when I think that what you’re talking about was actually a date, so I can’t sympathize.”

“Well, I mean, I’m talking about that time on that field trip when I had to go buy ingredients for the curry we made.”

“Nah, Orito. You definitely lose this one.”

“Huh? That wasn’t a sign that she was interested in me? Huh?”

“It sure is nice that there’s gun and sword control in Japan.”

“If times were different, he would just commit seppuku, wouldn’t he?”

“Huh? Eh? Wha? Seriously?”

And both Tomonori and I, as if telling a patient that he didn’t have long to live, with perfectly matching timing, gave Orito slow, grave nods.

Part 3

The next day, we had a choice for gym class. Our school took feedback from students seriously, so they often implemented nice systems like this for us.

We could either go to the pool or play basketball in the gym. Naturally, I picked the latter. Orito seemed really displeased by that, but if that was the case, then he should have just picked the other option. There really wasn't a reason he *had* to come with me.

It goes without saying that the majority of the students picked the pool, but because of that, we had this huge, spacious gym all to ourselves.

Fufufu. It was finally time for me to show off my zombie abilities.

“Aikawaaa~~!” Tomonori called my name.

“How should we split the teams? We don't really have enough to just do boys versus girls.”

“Whatever. Let's just split them somehow.”

Orito stared at the girls as they stretched. First, everyone gathered in the middle of the room, and we decided teams fairly based on rock-paper-scissors. Everyone picked either rock or paper, and the ones who matched were on the same team.

“Yeah! Aikawa and me are on the same team!”

I was put on the same team as Tomonori, who was as pumped up as a military leader from a belligerent country who had just captured an enemy general. As for the other people I knew on my team...

There was another quiet-looking girl with bound twin tails that dangled down in front of her chest. She was a pretty girl who

looked like she came right out of a tragic fairy tale.

Her name was Hiramatsu Taeko. She was in my class, had top grades, and was an honors student who had even won a Hyakunin Isshu¹¹ tournament in the past. I had been lectured about her by Orito before.

“Gahaha!!” Orito’s indecent laugh echoed through the gymnasium. “I think we’ve got this one!”

When I took a look at Orito’s team... Uwah! There were some really tall people on his side. That was just way too unfair! There was a blue-eyed guy with a face that could have come from an English prince.

“That’s pretty amazing... Was someone like that really in our school?”

“Aikawa-kun... All this time... Did you never notice Anderson-kun?”

Hiramatsu whispered towards me. At some point, Tomonori had left to get the ball.

“His name is Anderson?”

“Actually... his name is Shimomura-kun... but he just looks too much like a foreigner...”

Ah, so they made “shimo” into “ander” and “mura” into “son.” I see.¹²

Also, he wasn’t a foreigner? He definitely didn’t look Japanese no matter how you looked at it!

“Someone as handsome as that must be popular with the girls.”

I wanted to talk a bit about him.

I was honestly surprised at that. I had always heard all about our classmates and what happened around the school from Orito, but I don’t remember ever finding anything he told me interesting, not

even once. After all, how did any of that have anything to do with me?

I'd seriously changed in the time since I met Yuu.

Everything was because of her.

"Yes... He's very... very popular... Sorry."

"Hm? Sorry for what?"

"I'm... really bad at physical things... so... I might hold our team back... and if we lose because of me..."

"We go to the gym for exercise, so it's much more important to enjoy ourselves than to think about who wins and who loses."

"...Yeah. Thanks... Aikawa-kun."

"All right! Aikawa, let's go! Well, it's not like you're going to win, though. We have Mihara and Anderson on our team! And two basketball team members too!"

Because of Orito, the nice atmosphere Hiramatsu and I had going on all came to nothing... What a tactless guy.

Tomonori brought the ball back and headed for the center circle.

Orito might have tried to take on the role of team captain, or the two basketball team members might just showing be restraint, but it was Orito who came to jump for the ball. Well then, it looked like I had no choice but to go myself to meet him.

"All right... Let's start!"

Tomonori tossed the ball up, Orito and I jumped... Dammit! He stepped on me!

The ball flew towards our opponent's end and was picked up by a girl.

"Here I gooooo~~!" She gave us a smile brimming with

confidence. That girl had her brown hair tied up. She was pretty tall, and had a bit of a mature air about her. The way she was dribbling the ball made me realize that she was a member of the basketball team.

“Mihara is dangerous! Someone guard her! Hurry!”

A guy on my team yelled out and moved to guard her himself, but Tomonori yelled out.

“We need to put two people on Kanami!”

But that command came a bit late. The girl cut from right to left and easily slipped through the defense. Another panicked member of my team moved in to guard, but she smoothly evaded him.

So that girl was named Mihara Kanami. There were some pretty cute girls in Tomonori’s class too... Wait, why am I talking like Orito now?

Tomonori went for Mihara and reached for the ball. She flapped her arms around as if trying to forcibly take the ball, but Mihara just smiled and dealt with it easily.

And then she threw the ball, passing it to Anderson-kun.

Ugh, dammit. There was no point whatsoever for me to be guarding Orito like this.

In the end, the point was scored easily with a dunk. Wow. And then there was a burst of applause around me.

“Aikawa, run!”

When Tomonori spoke, I began to run with all my might towards our opponent’s basket. Tomonori was probably thinking of trying an extremely long pass. Everyone has tried this at least once, right?

Mihara and the others were also probably not playing seriously, so the pass actually succeeded. All that was left was to do a layup and even the score.

I softly flew through the air, and the minute the ball left my fingertips...

“Naïve, Aikawa!”

Orito was defending... not the basket. Rather, he sent his shoulder right into me in a bomber's tackle, and I crashed into the gym wall. Didn't he care about fouls?!

Fufufu, all right then! If that was how he wanted to play it...!

At that point, basketball ended. What then started from there was... a game of death basketball.¹³ It was a game without any respect for the rules.

Every time Tomonori tried to shoot, Mihara would start tickling her. I would hurl the ball at Orito, and some of the other boys also started to play dodgeball with the ball.

Even though I had taken Anderson-kun to be a serious person, I saw him pass the ball to Orito, and when Orito went to take a layup shot, Anderson-kun knocked the ball back with a block that belonged more to a volleyball match. Orito's face rubbed against Anderson-kun's trousers.

And Hiramatsu, who wasn't good at sports, just watched from afar and kept on laughing.

The only person who was actually trying to play proper basketball was the basketball team member Mihara.

She passed the ball under her legs and seemed to be enjoying herself as she dribbled across the court. I stood in front of her and blocked her progress.

I just had to stop her lightning-fast drive down the court. I figured out her intended path from the hand she was dribbling with and bent down.

“Aikawa, that's a pretty good defense there. You play often?”

“Just a few times during gym.”

"If you can stop me from scoring, I'll acknowledge you as Yuki-chan's¹⁴ husband."

"What? It's not like I want that to be acknowledged by anyone."

"Hmph. Oh look, Orito is sexually harassing Yuki-chan."

For just a single moment, I glanced to the side, and...

"Hyah." Mihara shot the ball. That was a damn nasty feint.

At that moment, I made a mistake. Perhaps I had gotten worked up by this ridiculous battle of fouls, perhaps I just suddenly didn't want to lose, or perhaps I felt something as a result of Mihara's words... I don't know what caused me to do what I did.

But at that moment, I chased after the ball and jumped a meter into the air.

I had used my zombie abilities just a bit.

I caught the ball and fell back to earth. A meter-high jump wouldn't be enough to make them suspicious, right? As I nervously glanced at the others, I saw that everyone had frozen to the spot as if paralyzed.

...This probably wasn't good.

"A-Aikawa..." Mihara pointed with a hand that shook in fear. She looked very frightened. It seemed that my superhuman powers were-

Krch. Hm? What was up with these bizarrely long hands? Why were my arms now being pinned behind my back? Indeed, what Mihara was pointing to was Anderson-kun, whose eyes were sparkling with happiness.

"Aikawa! Please join our basketball team!"

Anderson-kun breathed raggedly as he held me tight.

"No, that jump would be perfect for volleyball!"

A guy on my team seemed really excited.

“No, no, he needs to join our accidental panty shot research club!”

Huh? A club as interesting as that existed in our school?

“Hey, aren’t you all forgetting one thing?”

Orito had one hand on the wall and was sweating heavily. He spoke while he ran a finger through his spiky hair.

“Aikawa collapses really easily.”

It seemed that they all agreed with Orito; the spectators’ shoulders drooped and they seemed to fall into depression.

“I guess nobody can be good at everything...”

Anderson-kun was crying. I don’t care. Just let go of me, dammit.

“Anderson should know this better than anyone else here, shouldn’t he?”

Hm? What did he mean? Orito swept up his bangs and walked towards us.

“Ah, Aikawa probably doesn’t know, but the person who always brings Aikawa to the infirmary is Anderson. I mean, he’s the biggest person here, after all.”

“Ahh...” After I let that sink in, I bowed my head to Anderson.

“Thank you for all your help.”

“Don’t worry about it. Everyone needs help sometimes.”

Anderson-kun flashed his white teeth as he smiled at me. Ahh... he sure was a good guy...

And so, for the first time in a long while, I was able to fully enjoy gym class.

Tomonori and I happily collected the balls and headed for the warehouse. On the way there...

“Ah, right, Aikawa. Did you know that we have hands-on cooking lessons tomorrow?”

“Really? I didn’t know.”

“I didn’t think so. I mean, you were sleeping. But we invited a chef here and they’re giving us cooking lessons tomorrow. We’re also in the same group, so let’s do our best!”

“So both our classes are doing it together?”

“Yeah. Tomorrow, fourth period is being changed from gym class to home ec. So today was the last day of gym.”

I see. Tomonori was in the class next door, so we had gym class together. And that class had changed to home ec tomorrow? To think that they hatched a plan like that while I was asleep...

“So, also. My rule is that you have to put potatoes in miso soup. Aikawa is in charge of the potatoes. So make sure you bring the potatoes tomorrow.”

“Yeah, all right. So who else is in our group?”

Like a slow kid, Tomonori searched her memory while counting on her fingers.

“Ummm... There’s Orito and Aikawa and me, and then Kanami and Hiramatsu... and then Anderson.”

Those guys? Hmm... I wondered what was happening. I’d never felt like that about school before.

For some reason, I found myself looking forward to our cooking lessons.

Part 4

I went home right after school ended. Rather, it would be more appropriate to say that I was dragged home forcibly by Tomonori. I opened the front door as I put a hand to my head, completely dizzy from the sunlight. Even though Tomonori hadn't tried to go through particularly sunny spots, I still felt like this... Dammit.

"Oh? You're home pretty early today."

Sera's head suddenly popped out from the living room.

"Yeah, Tomonori took me home. The sun wasn't strong enough today to actually make me faint."

"You two... seem to be getting along pretty well, as usual."

Sera's expression was gloomy. Sera and Tomonori both belonged to opposing vampire ninja factions. I wonder if she was just a bit jealous here...

"Also, I'm leaving for a bit for the planetarium."

"Planetarium? Did you find Hellsythe-dono?"

"No... Actually, it's to hang out with Tomonori..."

"...I... see. Well, taking breaks is also important, I suppose. It might be better than just searching around in a desperate panic... Perhaps."

I could have sworn she sounded angry with me. I would have preferred for her to clearly say that I shouldn't play around right now.

I walked up the stairs, still holding my head, and changed out of my clothes.

There was still a little time before we were supposed to meet, but

there was nothing to do at home, so maybe I should go a bit early?

When I left my room, I bumped into Haruna. Haruna was wearing a large T-shirt and polka-dotted panties and nothing else, and she was stuffing her face with ice cream.

“Hueh? Ayumu’s here? Where are you going?”

“Ah, I’m actually going on a date.”

“Da-! Da-! Daaaa?!”

What the hell was up with those sound effects? It wasn’t like we were in a suspense thriller movie at the time.

“I-idiot Ayumu! I’m not going with you! I can see why you want to go on a date with me, but... I-I’m still...”

“No, it’s not with you.”

“Wha-?!”

Haruna was rooted to the spot like a stone statue. I passed her and went down the stairs.

Part 5

We were supposed to meet in front of the station. It was still about fifteen minutes before our meeting time, but Tomonori was already waiting for me. When she saw me, she waved and rushed over to meet me.

“Aikawa, you’re so slooow~~.”

“But, I mean, I’m here early...”

I wonder how many times I’d actually seen Tomonori in her street clothes.

I was expecting her to dress pretty sloppily in a t-shirt and jeans, but she wore a pair of shorts that covered her slender, healthy legs, along with a vest and a white t-shirt that made her breasts look twice as big as they did when she was in her school uniform. For her shoes, she had gone with boots rather than sneakers.

“Here’s your ticket. Come on, let’s get going.”

Tomonori took my hand and pretty much leapt all the way to the train station’s ticket window.

It seemed we had to be there by 5 pm, so she was in a hurry.

Tomonori was smiling the entire time we were on the train, and I could even hear her humming. When she acted like this, she really seemed just like a boy.

Just standing here and getting shook around by the train was fine and all, but we were finally alone, so I thought that maybe I should try to get some vampire ninja information out of her, but I couldn’t think of anything to ask. Something I could only ask Tomonori... Something I had to ask Tomonori... What was there?

Hm? When I thought about it...

“You know, I’ve always wondered, but... Why did you choose the name Yoshida Yuki?”

“Hmm...” After she thought about it for a bit, she seemed to hit on the answer. “Ah, right!” she exclaimed. It seemed that she had forgotten about it.

“I mean, if you start a name with ‘Yoshi,’ it feels like a girl’s name, doesn’t it? I wanted a name that sounded like a girl’s.”

“But ‘Mael’ also sounds a lot like a girl’s.”

Tomonori stiffened when I said that.

“When I got that name, I thought it was a pretty good name too, and I was very happy.”

“When you got that name... Normally, you get a name before you’re born or right after.”

“I’m a vampire ninja, and if we haven’t completed training yet then we don’t get a name. Once we’re done and the others are convinced that we can definitely fight demons, we’re given Eucliwood Hellscythe’s blood and we become vampire ninjas. That’s when we get our names.”

“It’s like what happens to Kabuki actors.”¹⁵

“Well, yeah, I guess.”

We smiled at each other.

“And then, last year, I discovered something when I saw our acting chief playing a Playstation game.”

“Oh? What was it?”

“I saw something really strange. The enemy monster used an attack called ‘Maelstrom.’”

“So it was an attack in the game?”

“And you know, I was reaaaaally shocked. Then I started to want another name. And if I ever went to high school, I would definitely need a fake name.”

“You... Don’t tell me that that’s the only reason you started going to school...”

“But... It was a squid. A squid who used Maelstrom.”

“That’s... I’m sorry.”

Seeing a squid do that must have been shocking. I wonder what game it was... If it was a Saga Series¹⁶ game, then I wanted to play it and see that monster too. Okay, something else I wanted to ask her... Oh yeah.

“Hey, Tomonori... Did you hear about what happened to Sera?”

Sera and Tomonori were in opposing factions, but they were both vampire ninjas. Tomonori probably knew that Sera had defied orders. I wondered if Tomonori also held that against Sera. Did it mean she wanted to kill her?

“Seraphim... Yeah, I heard about that.”

“So you won’t forgive her for that?”

“I understand why Seraphim did what she did... But, to be honest, as a vampire ninja, I can’t forgive her.”

So even Tomonori thought like that. Could it be that she also wanted to kill Seraphim?

“But that was still pretty amazing.”

“Amazing?”

“Yeah. That wasn’t something you could do without being really determined. I mean, worst case scenario, you get labeled a fugitive ninja and you’re hunted until you die... So I think that someone like

Seraphim, who would pick that path, and someone like Eucliwood Hellscythe, who could actually give Seraphim the determination to do that, are both really amazing. So... I don't want to kill them or anything."

I see... That's true. So Tomonori was that kind of person. Rather than blindly following laws or accepting the official view, she could look at things objectively. That's why, when it came to Tomonori, I really felt...

...What was this? Dammit. Again? Once again, I felt an itching in my chest. Why? All I could see running around my head was Yuu with a lonely expression on her face.

Part 6

I planned to sleep through the Planetarium trip, since I wasn't especially interested, but the lady giving the lecture had a prettier voice than I expected, and as she explained the mythology behind the Summer Triangle Constellation, I actually found myself paying attention.

"Oohhh!! Really?! That's amazing, isn't it Aikawa?!"

Tomonori took every single possible opportunity to yell out her impressions. I heard chuckles coming from all around us at her child-like responses, but as for me, I was just embarrassed.

"Tomonori, calm down a little..."

"D-don't call me Tomonori at a place like this!"

So where should I call her that, then?

"Anyways, just calm down a bit."

But my advice went unheeded... She really was a kid.

Geez, you're the only one who's making this much of a fuss, you know. Just look around you. Everyone around you is really calm and quiet-

"Ugh, dammit! When are we going to see a red comet?!"

Everyone around us was quiet-

"Also, what's up with that Big Dipper?! There's not enough of Alcor!"

I guess there *was* one other loud and annoying person here.

Just hearing that voice was enough to make me almost fall out of my chair. It was the last voice I wanted to hear, and I could feel the sudden strong urge to run away.

"Haruna, please calm down a bit."

“But, but! They haven’t even talked about Namek!¹⁷ I majored in the Namek language in school too!”

You could study the Namek language at Matelis Magical Academy? I sort of wanted to take that class too... No, no, no, stop thinking like that.

I’d just ignore her.

Yes... No one else is here. No one else... is here...

The lady up front began to talk about the story of Altair and Vega, and I thought back to Tanabata.¹⁸ When I thought about Tanabata, I wondered what Yuu was doing. I really wanted to see her. I really wanted to see her and talk with her.

Altair and Vega were fifteen light-years apart. Even though Orihime and Hikoboshi were so far from each other, they still desperately tried to meet each other. If I just knew how, I also would...

But I couldn’t just stand there and think gloomy thoughts like that.

“Veeegaaa.”

Don’t say that like you’re saying “Sega.”¹⁹

“The NEC Wega!”²⁰

Don’t say that like you’re some overly-excited company president. Also, Sony made the Wega.

“What about Iscandar?²¹ I don’t care about Shadaloo’s leader²² or these specks that they tell you sort of look like animals if you squint hard enough. They should focus on the proper stars!”

Why was it that this girl just couldn’t tell the difference between fiction and nonfiction?

...Dammit... I really wanted to turn back and yell at her.

“Aikawa, what’s wrong? Your face... It looks really stiff for some reason...”

Tomonori seemed pretty worried about me. Although she was part of the reason why my face looked like this.

“Nah, everything’s fine.”

I was just about to turn around and yell, “That’s a different Vega!” over and over and over, but Tomonori’s voice brought me back to myself.

Nice going, me. You actually got through that without bursting. Good job.

Part 7

It would have been a shame to just go home right after the Planetarium, so I invited Tomonori to go eat with me.

We went into a department store nearby and strolled through the store's row of restaurants. Should we go for Italian, or traditional Japanese? We laughed together and pointed to the samples set in front of the restaurants as we leisurely made our decision. And while all that was happening, Tomonori kept on briefly glancing behind her.

I did notice. Or, rather, it would have been hard not to notice.

There were two girls chasing behind us, carrying awfully large suitcases.

"Tomonori, ignore them. If you pay attention to them, they win."

"A-alright... B-but..."

It seemed like Tomonori just couldn't ignore them.

I guess I had no choice. I would go and tell them off quickly.

"Wait here for just a second." With that one word, I quickly headed for Haruna and Sera.

Haruna was wearing a shirt and short jeans. Sera was in jeans and a camisole with a three-quarter sleeved V-neck over it.

"Why are you two here?"

"I-it's obviously just a huge coincidence!"

"Liar. Sera, what's the meaning of this?"

"If you must know, I held a brainstorming session to find out how

to disrupt your happiness, and that's why I am here."

"That's so not nice!"

"Haruna-san won't forgive you for going on a date!"

Haruna tried to intimidate me, her mouth opened as wide as a dinosaur ready to spit out radiation. Exactly who did she think she was?

"By the way, Ayumu! Take a look at this!"

Before I could tell them to go home, Haruna triumphantly held up her large suitcase.

"What the hell is that?"

"It's obviously your bentou! It's really delicious, ya know?!"

Gulp. I could feel myself salivating just at the thought of Haruna's cooking. Not good, not good. I came here to tell these two to go home...

"Is there somewhere we can eat this?"

"Why don't we go up to the roof?"

Hey, ugh, Sera... Let go of my hands. Was she trying to use force?! She caught my arms and began to pull me along.

What amazing power. Did I do something to make her angry or something?

Tomonori just stood there and stared at us with her mouth dangling open, and it took all my strength to mumble to her that we were going to the roof to eat.

We rode the elevator and went out onto the roof. The sky was already dark, and there weren't many people around.

As we stood on that roof, surrounded by decorative plants and lamps, Haruna put the stacked boxes on the table and opened them

up.

“Tomonori, sorry about this.”

“Hm? Ahh, it’s fine, I don’t mind... I’m satisfied! At least we could be together... Haha.”

Sera’s jade-colored eyes stared like daggers at Tomonori. Tomonori responded with a bitter smile and a forced laugh, going into a long stretch.

“Maybe I really should head back first.”

It must have been awkward to be here with Sera. Sera, meanwhile, was probably thinking about the possibility that Tomonori would try to kill her. So she was definitely on her guard. Well, it wasn’t like they would try to kill each other in a public place like this, but it was still definitely a rather explosive situation.

Perhaps she felt guilty when she saw Tomonori stand up with a lonely expression, but Haruna grabbed Tomonori by the arm.

“H-hey... You stay and eat too.”

“Eh? It’s fine. I don’t get hungry, so...”

“Liar.”

“It’s the truth! I’m-“ *Growwwlll*.

And again with that. Why did this girl always insist that she wasn’t hungry?

Tomonori’s face flushed deep red, and Haruna nodded energetically.

“The minute you think about your stomach is the minute you get hungry.”

“I-I’m not hungry!”

From then on, Tomonori was as cheerful as she always was.

“Let’s eat together then.”

I smiled at Tomonori. Meals were definitely more fun when there were more people.

“It’s fine, right Sera?”

“It’s not like I mind...”

Sera still seemed to have Tomonori on her mind. It was obvious that she thought she had a right to be here and Tomonori didn’t. Sera’s pretty, jade-colored eyes were filled with animosity.

“Sera, relax. Tomonori isn’t like the other vampire ninjas. Don’t look scary like that.”

“Your face is what’s scary. Scary in how disgusting it is, I mean.”

“Maybe I really should-“

“It’s fine, Tomonori. Let’s eat together! Please.”

“I-if Aikawa wants to eat together that much...”

Tomonori scratched the head of her nose as she returned to her seat. And then Tomonori and I smiled at each other.

“Somehow, seeing you two smile like that makes me want to hit you with a five iron.”

Why?! Haruna pouted and watched me quietly.

All right, what was for dinner today?

With much anticipation, I opened up the boxes and saw... What was this jelly thing that seemed like it would recharge me in 10 seconds?²³ And the stuff over there just looked like biscuits to me.

“I tried to make fugu and foie gras into meals that could be eaten on a space shuttle!”

What a horrible waste! What the hell was up with that meat thing that looked like canned cat food?

I was about to complain, but instead I took a bite. Haruna's cooking was amazing no matter how it looked.

Geez... Just look at that. It was definitely delicious.

Dammit, what was that? The seasoning and texture were just sublime. Yeah, that's all I could say.

Tomonori just sat there and watched me, and I could see her gulping.

"Come on, Tomonori, eat some."

"Maybe I really should-"

"Mael Strom. Just so you know, there's really no need for you to go on a diet."

Tomonori's true intentions were seen through by Sera, and she blushed red from ear to ear.

"It's fine, just eat some. I think it'd be fun to watch you eat."

When she heard that, Tomonori seemed satisfied with that as an excuse. "Well, if Aikawa wants it that badly..." she said, and took a bite of the cat-food-looking meat.

"Amazing! I've never had anything like this before!!"

Without another word, Tomonori took out a bottle of sesame oil from her bag. Did she really carry around dressings like that with her all the time?

"Tomonori, you better not put that on there."

"Eh? I can't?"

Tomonori looked like she was near tears, so I passed her the bentou box lid. She could use it as a small personal plate.

"Ugh, I kinda want to take a full swing at Ayumu with a sand wedge now..."

Seriously, why?! Haruna pouted and watched me quietly.

Sera couldn't seem to pick up the jelly with her chopsticks. She looked bewildered and proceeded to only eat the cat-food-looking thing.

Tomonori was stuffing her face with the jelly, which was now drenched in sesame oil, and looked like she was in a state of supreme bliss.

“Amaaaazing~~! This is seriously great! Where do they sell this?!”

“Hueh? I made all this myself. Ah, this thing here is called Bahamut's foie gras.”

Fatty liver from the dragon king... That sounded sort of depressing.

“Awesome!! Can I call you ‘master’?!”

“Master... A-are you talking to me?”

Haruna seemed a bit annoyed, but then her cheeks flushed red.

“Master! Teach me how to cook!”

“Hueh?” Haruna stared in bewilderment, but then smiled. She didn't seem all too unsatisfied with Tomonori's words.

“Well... I mean... I guess that's nyot a bad idea.”

Ny... Nyot? She said nyot, didn't she? I couldn't help but look again at Haruna as she blushed.

Was she wearing cat ears or something?! That was way too cute!

“Thank you! Thank you master!”

“I-it's not like I want to or anything, all right?!”

“Did you hear that, Aikawa?! Soon I'll be able to make things that'll make you squirm too!”

As she said that, Tomonori grinned. And then...

“No, no, I don’t think I can do this anymore! I definitely can’t!! Ugaaaah!” Haruna cried out.

We heard a single cough, so all three of us turned towards the beauty with the jade eyes and ponytail.

“Next is my turn.”

And then Sera puffed out her chest.

Don’t tell me... I thought.

“Haruna... Did you let Sera into the kitchen?”

“Nah. I... don’t think she went in even once.”

“Yes, Haruna wouldn’t let me into the kitchen no matter what, so it really was quite a bother.”

As she said that, Sera took out a huge roll of cloth that was even bigger than Haruna’s box. She laid it on the table. Where in the world had she been hiding that thing? Damn ninja.

And that cloth really looked weird. I wondered why the cloth was in the shape of a vase, but when Sera opened the cloth up, I saw that it was definitely a vase. But I didn’t have the courage to peek and see what was inside.

“Well, go ahead.”

Tomonori peered into the vase, seeming very interested. Tomonori-san, how fearless are you?!

“Hm? There’s nothing inside.”

Tomonori picked up the vase, turned it upside down, and shook it. However, nothing came out.

“Well, Ayumu. Please bite into it.”

“Into this vase?”

Wait... Seriously...?

“Yes.”

As I thought! That vase was the final product!

“T-this isn’t food. This is pottery, isn’t it?”

“What a strange thing to say. No matter how you look at it, this is obviously gyoza.”

“This was supposed to be gyoza?!”

Even Haruna ended up butting in at that shocking revelation.

“Yes. To make gyoza skin, you have to spin the potter’s wheel like this... And then, oh my, how strange.”

“It’s too strange, isn’t it?! It’s so strange it’s making my nose run!”

“But I wonder how it tastes...”

Tomonori seemed to begin to show an interest in the vase... Don’t tell me she was going to... Tomonori, don’t you value your own life?!

“Please, Mael Strom, feel free to take a bite.”

Perhaps she was incredibly happy that someone was showing interest in her cooking, but Sera went from making a scary face to giving a smile. Tomonori probably couldn’t see it... Couldn’t see the form of the Grim Reaper standing behind that vase, beckoning to her.

“All right then! Thanks for the meal!”

Tomonori put dressing on the vase near the opening, then opened her mouth wide and bit into the vase with abandon.

She bit into the vase with a satisfied grin on her face, like a boy would bite into one of his favorite snacks.

She bit into the vase, smiling brightly all the while.

And then time stopped for Tomonori.

Like a flame blown out of a candle, the light from Tomonori's eyes disappeared.

"A... ika... wa... Help... **Abnormality detected in host body. Removing all restrictions on weapons.**"

A ghost-like thing appeared behind Tomonori's back. It looked like a muscular man on the right side and a flickering flame on the left. That was the masou weapon that Dai-sensei had inserted into Tomonori.

"Liberate your frozen heart." "First chant confirmed. Technique activated."

Crap! The masou weapon inside Tomonori had been activated...!

"Tomonori! Hey, Tomonori! At least wipe off that drool!"

"Change even the breaths of Gods into blizzards." "Second chant confirmed. Preparations for cooling complete."

This one... This was the one that indiscriminately froze all her surroundings, right? In a public place like this... This was bad!

"Wait! Wha-?! What's going on?!"

Haruna seemed panicked as she looked back and forth between me and Tomonori.

Now that I thought about it, this was the first time Haruna had seen the weapon inside Tomonori.

"Ayumu! Hurry up and stop her!"

Well-aware of what could happen, Sera rose to her feet and prepared to run for shelter.

"Tomonori! Please! Come back to yourself!"

I took her by both shoulders and began to shake her, and Tomonori finally came back to her senses with a "Ah."

At the same time, the half-ghost masou weapon thing behind her vanished into smoke.

For some reason, it seemed that the masou weapon couldn't activate unless Tomonori was unconscious.

"A-Aikawa... What happened?"

"You almost died. From cooking."

"You've got to be kidding me."

"Well, normally, cooking is the act of turning something that can't be eaten into something that can be eaten."

Chef Haruna's words sunk to the very bottom of my heart. That was a really nice way of putting it. Yup, yup.

"Yes, that is precisely right."

Sera nodded along with me. You! You don't have the right to nod here!

"Well then, let's continue."

There was more?! Give me a break!

The next cloth bundle that she took out was... squirming around quite a bit. Was there something alive in there?

"I tried making octopus wieners next²⁴. I only started cooking after Ayumu came home, so there wasn't much time, but I tried my best."

Oh? If all you had to do was to cut and grill something, then maybe even Sera could handle it.

As I mumbled that to myself, I unwrapped the cloth bundle. And then...

Why in the world was I still giving her the benefit of the doubt when I had seen the cloth bundle moving earlier?

When I opened the cloth bundle, I found one live octopus inside.

It was a real octopus... And what was up with this octopus? Why did it have eyebrows? And why was it giving me such a foppish facial expression?

“It’s alive!”

Tomonori fearlessly went for Sera’s chest as she retorted. The back of her hand squished and bounced off Sera’s rather large breasts. But Sera caught Tomonori’s hand and twisted upwards.

“Wha?! Uncle! Uncle! Uncle Sam!”²⁵

“Devish is a nice ingredient, isn’t it? You can boil it, you can grill it...”

“Devish?”

“Short for devilfish.”²⁶

Haruna softly massaged the octopus’s head. The foppish octopus watched me with a sharp look. At least, it looked like he was giving me a sharp look, but it was probably just because of his eyebrows.

“That’s not a bad looking octopus.”

Tomonori, please at least wipe off that drool.

“Well, can you eat this? It’s definitely not food though...”

Haruna’s ahoge stood straight up.

“Certainly... I think you might be able to eat it... But it’s a really, really strange creature we have here.”

“It wasn’t farmed, you know. This is a bona fide, wild-caught animal.”

Sera smiled proudly. Could something as weird as this really exist in nature?!

When I looked on the back of the octopus’s head, I saw a label that read, “Not Genetically Engineered.” And on one of the leg, I found a

tag which read, “Made in Mars”... this thing was from Mars?!

“How the hell did you get something like this...”

After my mumbling, Sera gave me a shy expression that I had never seen on her before.

“Haruna said something once. She said that the goal of cooking isn’t to make something, but to have something eat what you make... So I wanted to have you eat my cooking.”

I see. She was always just trying to enjoy herself when she cooked. So that’s why, in the end, her cooking would just knock out whoever ate it.

“Seraphim... cooks for others...”

Tomonori gulped. Ahh, I was surprised too.

“So I won’t lose to you. All right, let’s divide up the food.”

A tree leaf began falling out of nowhere. That leaf transformed into a sword in Sera’s hand.

In the next moment... The octopus seemed to sense the danger it was in and dived towards the brick-colored floor from the table.

Four of its eight legs began moving like the legs of a sprinter, propelling itself along. Its remaining four legs became like arms, which also waved back and forth like the arms of a sprinter. Did that thing have joints? That really was quite a bizarre creature... No, that wasn’t the time to be impressed!

I stood up and chased after it.

“Sera! Catch it!”

Sera caught a new leaf in her hand and threw it.

Krschh!! The knife-like leaf pierced right into me.

“I missed.” ...Was that it?! Aren’t you going to apologize?!

That damn octopus! Who the hell said octopi are fish?! That thing definitely moved like a land animal!

To think that thing could be faster than a zombie... It was moving so fast that I wouldn't be surprised if it was wearing one of those Falling Star Bracelets from Dragon Quest.²⁷ Dammit, it went into the building. If something like that ran around, it would definitely cause a panic.

But in situations like this, we could always rely on our ninjas. Our ninjas..... Our ninjas..... Nobody was coming! Was I the only one chasing this thing?!

I chased after the octopus, feeling like I was being trained by King Kai.²⁸

...Why in the world was I chasing something like this? There were plenty of other things I had to chase.

Ah, I could feel the nausea rising up in my chest again.

Yuu, Dai-sensei, Kyouko, and the King of the Night... Crap, my mind was wandering too much.

The octopus was snatched up by someone else.

I saw a man in front of me wearing an apron. He was the one who had caught the octopus for me. When I saw that his apron had a picture of a dog on it, I guessed that he was an employee at the pet shop.

“Ah, sorry! That octopus is-“

It was a strange octopus. I was certain this guy was making a pretty disgusted face right now, so I very, very timidly looked up from my crouched position to peek at the guy's reaction.

“Hey, how nice to meet you here.”

And the person there... The person smiling happily at me... was the King of the Night.

Huh?

.....Huh?

“There there there there...” The man patted the octopus’s squishy head and a kind smile rose to his lips. The sharp-looking octopus with eyebrows sunk into a stupor.

.....Huh? Was he a different guy?

He was the cause behind all our troubles... And he was wearing an apron with a dog drawn on it. Around her were narrow-looking cases that contained sleeping cats and dogs. Here, in this place without an ounce of tension, I managed to meet an enemy I had to defeat!



A hunched-over, kind-looking granny spoke up to the King of the Night as he continued holding the octopus.

“Yoruno-san, Yoruno-san, do you have any shampoo that’s good for

getting rid of fleas?”

Y-Yoruno-san? Don't tell me he picked a fake name that even sounded like “King of the Night”!²⁹

“How about this one? We only got this in recently, but it's my recommendation for flea removal.”

“Ah. Well, if Yoruno-san recommends this one, then I'll buy it.”

He was a nice employee who earned the faith of his customers... Except not at all! I shook my head to dispel those evil thoughts and put on a serious expression.

“You... you're the King of the Night, aren't you? What are you doing in a place like this?”

“I live in this world, and therefore I need the money to do so. So I have a part-time job.”

Well, I guess that's true... But, I mean, was it really okay for you to have a part-time job?

And at a pet shop, no less... I gave a final glance at the granny as she went to the register with the shampoo and began to ask about Dai-sensei, but...

The King of the Night was in the puppy petting corner, grooming a puppy's fur.

I felt my heart beat faster. It wasn't because I was nervous. It was because I was really happy.

Because I had wanted to meet this person even more than I wanted to encounter metal slimes in Dragon Quest!

“Yoruno-saaan~, your shift is over~~.”

Another employee came over, and the King of the Night handed over the brush.

“Do you like animals?”

It seemed it was time for him to leave work, and he began to chat with me as he smiled and folded up his apron. Meanwhile, I was still completely bewildered by the situation.

“Ahh, I guess I don’t hate them, but...”

“To be honest, the one who suggested that we make Megalo look like animals was me.”

“More importantly... Is Dai-sensei safe?”

“Hm? Ahh, she is a being that may actually be able to kill me. I have not killed her.”

The octopus seemed to have warmed up to him quite a bit and was riding on his shoulder. The dogs in their glass cases were also looking at the King of the Night affectionately.

“Did you manage to make one of those masou weapons? Just once, I sort of want to see what kind of amazing powers it has.”

I guess you could say that once someone catches the scent of something they’re interested in, they naturally want to talk about it more.

“It will be soon. We’re currently ordering something that will throw the world into chaos.”

So we didn’t have much time. The granny from before gave the King of the Night a bow and went off with a satisfied smile. What the hell? From all this... he really just seemed like a pretty good person.

As I thought about these things, the King of the Night walked off into the pet shop’s staff room.

That wasn’t good. What should I do? I couldn’t just let him escape from under my very nose.

It was the first clue we had found in a long while.

“Ah, here he is. Ayumu, what are you doing?”

Haruna and Sera came to the pet shop.

“Do you want a pet? You can’t have one. Throw it away, please.”

Sera scolded me with the strictness of a mother. And throw it away, she says...

“I want to raise a tuna.”

“Master. Even if you raised one, it would die pretty quickly, wouldn’t it?”

Haruna and Tomonori shared a laugh. They seemed to be getting along pretty well.

Tomonori... Right! I could borrow the power of the vampire ninjas!

“Tomonori, sorry, but I need you to do something for me.”

I gave them a serious look, and the three of them gave me serious looks in return.

Part 8

It had become completely dark. The Tokyo night sky was completely clouded over, blocking any stars from view.

The sky was filled with clouds, but like stars in the night sky, the streets were bursting with people. There were salarymen who were returning from work and students who were returning from their clubs... And among those people, there was that man.

The King of the Night... A zombie like me. And as his name would suggest, this time of the day was his time.

We left the department store and tailed the King of the Night as he strolled around calmly. We walked through a wide street lined with restaurants. We matched our pace with the river-like flow of the people around us and headed for the station.

Whether he realized we were following him or not, the King of the Night just continued forward with his hands in his pockets.

Haruna, Sera, and I did our best to stay behind cover as we followed after him.

Tomonori was currently calling all the other vampire ninjas together for us. It was definitely a sounder plan to surround him with vampire ninjas rather than for us to try and catch him here.

“Ayumu... How long are we going to follow him around?”

Haruna seemed a bit worked up, her ahoge swaying from side to side.

“We need to wait for the vampire ninjas to get here...”

“I can’t wait any more!”

“Idiot! If we let him get away now, we’ll lose our only clue to find Dai-sensei...”

As if she really just couldn’t keep still anymore, Haruna ran towards

the King of the Night with her upper body almost toppling forwards.

“Did she even hear me?”

“Where’s Dai-sensei?! You damn hentai!”

Haruna’s screech pierced through the air. At the same time, the King of the Night disappeared from the crowd.

“Ayumu...!” Sera scowled and almost yelled my name.

“I know. Let’s go.”

Now we’d done it. Now that it had come to this, we had to try to catch him at all costs.

Haruna changed direction, and I kicked off the asphalt.

We had just suddenly started running at full speed, so the people around us gave us suspicious looks, but I had no time to care about that. Don’t just stand there, dammit, get out of our way!

Couldn’t they see we were in a hurry?

The King of the Night lightly ran away. It was almost as if he wanted us to follow him, but I didn’t care. Rather, it would be convenient if there was an ambush or a trap up ahead.

No matter what it was, it would be a clue!

We turned a few corners, and when we entered a narrow street, Haruna stopped in her tracks.

It was a dead end. A narrow, long dead end, covered in a bit of dirt and wedged in between two restaurants. From the bad smell in the air, I wouldn’t be surprised if this was a place people threw their garbage.

One man stood, alone, in that dead end. He had his usual smile on, his hands were in his pockets, and he stood there with a lazy posture.

"I don't see Eucliwood with you. Even though she hates me more than any of you do."

"Yuu is..."

"Could it be that she returned to the Underworld?"

"Yeah, probably."

As soon as I made that short response, his smiling face transformed into that of a demon. Rage welled up in his eyes. Those eyes of his were enough to make goosebumps rise on my flesh.

However, that lasted but a second, and soon he returned to his slightly teasing, condescending, bold smile.

"All right, I guess it's time to kill you all."

He shrugged his shoulders and said that almost as if he was making fun of us. Sera watched the King of the Night with red eyes.

Whshhhh. He took just one step towards us, and I felt an incredible sense of pressure assault my body.

I looked not at the King of the Night, but all around us. Sera's eyes also darted here and there. There might be a trap here, somewhere.

However, Haruna was...

"I'm going to punch this guy right noooooowww!!"

Haruna was holding her fist up. But I quickly caught her hand.

"Idiot! Haruna!"

"Don't stop me!" Haruna turned around, and I saw an intense fire burning in her large eyes.

"Let me punch him instead."

If we were going to jump into a trap, then the person who couldn't die should be the one to take the leap. I pushed Haruna to the side and jumped right up to the King of the Night. But as soon as I did, I

felt a sharp kick slam into my jaw.

I didn't see it at all. I saw a blue mist appear in front of my eyes, and then, in the next moment, I felt something collide with my cheek.

Something hit my face with a lot of force.

I couldn't see that either. I couldn't even understand what had happened to me.

But I didn't care! I held my ground and launched a punch.

Next, I felt a heel come down on top of my head, and I was knocked down to the ground.

"Now, you were a zombie, were you not?"

"You're also a zombie, aren't you?"

"Well, then there's no reason to deal with you. Let me kill the other two."

...Seriously? I felt a sense of relief surface somewhere within me.

After all, I never thought that we would be settle this here and now. I expected him to show his face briefly and then try and run away.

"Why are you doing this?" I almost moaned out that question, and the King of the Night looked down at me.

"Why? Hmm, I suppose I can tell you. It would be boring to just kill you all, so I'll explain while I'm doing that."

The King of the Night said that and, in the next moment, ran to Haruna's back.

It wasn't something as silly as super speed. It felt like something more frightening than that.

Haruna looked behind her. The King of the Night took his right hand out of his pocket and swung it down onto Haruna's cute head.

But Sera cut that right hand off. The King of the Night was right between Haruna and Sera. In other words, Haruna's back was Sera's front.

Nice one! As expected from Sera!

"Hiken, Tsubamegaeshi!"

And then the return stroke. He shouldn't be able to evade that.

"You're faster than I expected."

In the next moment, without warning, blood burst out of Sera's back, and she fell to her knees. Once again, I had no idea what had just happened.

"You asked for a reason, didn't you? Let me start from the end. It's all to drag Eucliwood out into this world."

"Even if you tell me that, I still don't know what's going on."

"You all seem to be close with Eucliwood. So if I kill two of you, I'm sure she will appear. Because she is a kind person."

"Don't screw with me! You think you can use me as bait?!"

Haruna tried to sweep his legs from under him. I heard the satisfying sound of Haruna's attack connecting, but the King of the Night didn't move an inch.

"Masou shoujo, you're quite an interesting one. I'm happy to see that you have such fighting spirit. Usually, people just wither in my presence."

The King of the Night gave us a forced, emotionless smile. Certainly, just as he said, I had withered in front of him. I had been attacked by something I didn't understand, Sera had been suddenly done in, and I just lay there, completely still.

But soon I got up and prepared to attack.

"If you three are really her friends, then you should die for her

sake. Do you not know what poor treatment she is subject to in the Underworld?"

"Ah, we don't at all!"

420%! I gathered power in my right arm. The King of the Night's kick sent Haruna flying, and after picking up his own right arm from the ground, he... threw his arm at me. What the hell was he, a Mazinger or something?!

I had no idea that he'd throw his own arm at me, so the attack hit me in the stomach. Or, rather, the attack pierced through my stomach.

"For comparison's sake, that attack was at around 400% the maximum power that humans can output. If you were human, it would have been incredibly painful, but... Oh well."

He was toying with us. He was completely toying with us.

Even Sera, who was propping herself up with a leaf sword, seemed at a loss as to what attack to launch next.

"Well, shall we continue with our story? Eucliwood herself is ill-suited for war. However, she is indispensable to the war against the masou shoujo. Her healing powers, her blood of immortality, the power of her words... If she felt like it, that girl could stand up to the masou shoujo. However, that girl does not want to use her power. So how do you think the other inhabitants of the underworld feel about that?"

".....They try to force her to use it."

Haruna groaned out a response.

"Exactly. However, subjecting her to pain won't yield results. Eucliwood has met enough hardship in her life to become accustomed to pain. So? Do you want to save her? I was like that once too. I am almost painfully aware of your feelings."

"I doubt that a zombie like you could understand pain."

“That’s quite rude. However, if you die, then that girl will reappear in this world. How about it? Do you want to die now?”

“Don’t screw with me! I’ve already decided that I’m going to meet her while I’m still alive!”

“You’re really quite dazzling. You’re like the sun. To the King of the Night, you’re quite... an unpleasant existence.”

At that moment, I saw the air turn dark. It wasn’t because it was night. It was as if the air itself was changing into killing intent. It became hard to breathe in that atmosphere, and I felt nauseous.

What the hell was this... I felt like a deer in the middle of a road, staring at an oncoming car but unable to move...

Was I an idiot?! If I had time to think about stupid things like that, then I had time to move my legs!

“Haruna! Retreat!”

I screamed that out as I prepared a low tackle.

Haruna did just as I asked and jumped back like a shrimp. If my tackle connected, Haruna would be able to escape from his range of attack. But if I failed...

“Here I go!”

Sera threw some green leaves. The leaves spun like shuriken and passed by the side of the King of the Night’s legs. He had dodged them.

However, perhaps because of that, I was able to grab onto the King of the Night’s torso.

How about this then?

I glanced in Haruna’s direction. From this distance, unless he did that Rocket Punch attack again, she should be out of his reach.

However, Haruna was punched on the cheek and was sent flying.

She probably guarded herself with a barrier, but her small body flew right into that mountain of garbage bags.

This time, I managed to see just what had happened.

I see... I finally understood what this man's ability was.

His dark blue mist could probably teleport objects around.

The area around his right wrist was surrounded in mist, and there was mist beside Haruna's face as well. His fist had come out of that mist.

The mist also seemed to chase after Haruna as she flew away.

It seemed Haruna still hadn't realized what the mist did.

Sera! Do something here! I really had no idea how to defend against that.

But then the vampire ninjas appeared.

"My, my... The guardians of this world have quite a good sense of smell."

"We've found the man we were told about! Requesting reinforcements!"

Much like Sera, vampire ninjas sure had a tendency to show up with heroic timing at the last moment. Or rather, maybe Haruna was just a lucky person.

A young girl with a blue transparent sword appeared in front of us. She was from the conservative faction, just like Sera, and she went to the same school that I did. Her name was... Actually, I never asked.

When the vampire ninja swung her water sword, the King of the Night shook me off and surrounded his body with mist.

I just quietly counted out the time.

“Unfortunately, I cannot allow you to catch me now. I still..... want to die, after all.”

The King of the Night gave us a bold smile and vanished into the mist.

Once the mist had gathered, it took around five seconds for the King of the Night to vanish. It was likely that he couldn't use the mist to teleport unless it was thick enough.

So if we didn't want him to escape, then we had to knock him out within at least five seconds.

“Don't let him get away!”

With that female voice, the vampire ninjas who had just gathered scattered in all directions. The few vampire ninjas who remained didn't seem to pay us any mind, and just began discussing something amongst themselves.

“Sorry, Saras... You saved us.”

Sera called out, but the girl swung her sword to the side with a demonic expression.

Ah, so that girl's name was Saras...

“Don't speak to me so casually! You traitor!”

Sera's eyes were filled with surprise. That sword swing wasn't just a feint. The sword's point cut into Sera's skin.

“You're an eyesore. Get out of my sight, Seraphim.”

Her voice was filled with anger, and she once again swung her sword.

Sera would have been able to nimbly evade the sword in normal circumstances, but her footing was unsteady and she couldn't dodge.

“Hey, wait just a second. You... Saras, was it? What are you doing?”

I tried to grab the girl with the water sword by the shoulder, but the other vampire ninjas pointed their swords at me, so I couldn't move.

"Don't call me that! My name is Sarasvati. The only ones who can call me Saras... are my comrades."

Sarasvati... Wasn't that a water goddess or something? Saras was definitely an easier name.

"Well then, I think I should be able to call you that too. But, more importantly, Sera hasn't done anything."

"She hasn't done anything, and that's exactly why we cannot forgive her."

That's exactly why... Was she talking about Sera's refusal to obey an order to kill Yuu?

"How is that so bad? She just disobeyed a single order."

In response to my words, Saras took me by the collar and narrowed her eyes.

"This is not a world where you can disobey orders that you dislike. We are risking our lives."

I see. Vampire ninjas were almost stupidly faithful to their laws, and their missions were their first priority. There were probably plenty of missions that they weren't happy about.

But even so, they had taken that difficult path to reach their current heights.

Even if she didn't say that out loud, I could understand at least that much.

"Seraphim, nobody wants to see your face anymore. Don't ever show yourself in front of us again."

As Saras gripped my body, she thrust a water sword into Sera.

“... I understand.”

But Sera just responded quietly, her voice quivering.

END CHAPTER 1

Chapter 2 – Don't Worry! Don't Mind Me and Just Fry It Already!



Part 1

Perhaps she had been overly shocked by the cold words she had gotten from her fellow vampire ninjas, but Sera had shut herself in her room.

I couldn't think of anything to say to Sera to cheer her up when she was like that, and I couldn't even peek into her room to see how she was doing either.

I had recently gotten into the habit of running around looking for the fake Megalo after school, but I couldn't get myself motivated that day and ended up just lying on my bed.

The King of the Night was trying to kill us, even though he was just

half-playing with us.

It was pretty clear to me that he probably could have easily killed us even without using his full strength. That's probably precisely why he let us go that time, but there was no mistaking it:

I'm sure that he would be able to crush us like bugs if he wanted to. That also explained why he was so brazenly working in the open, going to his part-time job without trying to hide it at all.

Geez, if we were facing someone like that... How in the world could we beat him?

For instance, suppose that I continued chasing after the fake Megalo, and eventually found both Kyouko and the King of the Night.

What could I do from there? Just get drunk from the sense of accomplishment, be proud that I had managed to find them?

I wouldn't be able to do anything, would I? God dammit!

Once again, I felt a throbbing inside my chest. It was a sickening feeling that was hard to describe. Yuu. Yuu. Yuu! Before I knew it, I found myself calling out Yuu's name in quick succession.

I see... Maybe that was it! Maybe that was the reason Yuu had run away from us! I was too weak and I couldn't protect Yuu. She couldn't stand being with someone as weak as me, someone who couldn't brush away the sparks that fell on us.

There was something I lacked. Something which Yuu couldn't put faith in. That was... power.

At the very least, if I didn't have enough power to beat the King of the Night, there was no way she would believe me if I told her I would be able to fix things. At some point, she would just probably run away from me again.

I lay there sprawled on my bed for a long time, and eventually Haruna came into my room.

“What are you doing?”

“Can’t you tell just by looking? Also, seriously, knock before you come in.”

“Don’t you have lots of other things to do other than this?”

Haruna probably wanted to tell me to go look for the King of the Night, for Dai-sensei’s sake.

“Yeah... Yeah, I know. But Haruna... You probably saw it when we fought him. Even if we catch up to the King of the Night, we’re no match for him.”

“I know! But who cares! All you have to do is get stronger!”

That’s easier said than done... it’s not like I could just go and...

“Hey Haruna, didn’t you say you couldn’t do anything other than make barriers?”

Hold on. There could be another possibility there.

“Hm? Well, sooner or later I’ll get all my magical power back, and-“

“What did you say back then? You know, when we first met.”

Ah right. If I remember correctly...

-

“My masou renki! Give it back! Quickly! Hurry! Now, quickly, immediately, without delay, without a moment’s hesitation, right away, right now, in a flash, straight away, right this minute, give it back!”

“Wait. Wait, wait. What’s a masou renki?”

“It’s what you’re holding! If I don’t have that, I can’t use attack magic!”

-

Wouldn’t that mean...?

“So, if I had a masou renki, would I be able to use attack magic too?”

Right? I didn’t need something as flashy as the magic that Dai-sensei had used. Even without that, zombies were weak to fire and light. If I could attack with fire, then I might have a chance of beating even the King of the Night.

“Obviously you could. Don’t underestimate Mystletainn.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, I mean... You’re a masou shoujo, after all.”

Yes... That’s true. I felt like I saw a ray of light breaking through the clouds. Or, well, rays of light are bad for zombies, so instead let’s just say that a ray of hope had appeared.

“All right then, Haruna. Teach me... Please.”

“Hueh? ...Okay! Just leave everything to me! I’ll make you into a perfect demon baron!”

All right, let’s not leave everything to her then. Suddenly I felt motivated. I was going to master this stuff as fast as possible! But first, I really had to help Sera get her confidence back...

“Haruna, have you talked with Sera?”

“Hueh? Well... Just a bit.”

“How was it?”

“She was really down in the dumps.”

“I see... I’m going to go check on her a bit. Haruna, can you just do anything you need to get ready?”

“Got it! Leave it to me!”

Haruna’s energy washed over me. If it wasn’t for her, I’d still probably be sulking...

I left the room, took a deep breath, and knocked on Sera's door.

I didn't get a response, so I just went in. Sera was sitting in the middle of the room with her eyes closed. Her black hair cascaded straight down like a waterfall, and she was the very picture of purity. I gulped, thinking that Sera also looked quite nice with her hair down like that.

"Sera, do you have a minute?"

"...What?"

Her eyes opened, piercing through me like blades. They weren't the same scornful eyes I was used to; they just looked lonely.

"Well, umm... I... understand how you must feel."

It would have been nice if I could break the ice with that, but I couldn't force anything out of my mouth, so we just remained there in silence. However, I knew I had to say something, so I just spoke without any real plan.

"You know, during elementary school, I went with my parents on an overseas trip and I wasn't in Japan for two years. When I came back, all my friends had found other friends, I didn't really know what was 'cool' anymore, and even when people came to talk with me, I couldn't really keep up a conversation. So during that time... when I was in fifth grade, I didn't really talk much to people."

I didn't know whether Sera was listening to me or not; she didn't give me any response.

"And at that time, my parents told me they were going on another trip. Well, they're still not back from that trip even now, but I decided... that I wouldn't go with them. Do you know why?"

Even I didn't really know why I was talking about all this.

The words just came out of my mouth before my brain could think of what to say.

"No. Why... didn't you go with them? It's not like there could have

been anybody here that actually needed you.”

That was quite a Sera-like response... It felt like she was digging a knife into an open wound... Well, I was pretty used to that by now.

“I had always been alone, so I convinced myself that being alone was fine and ran away. I convinced myself that being alone wasn’t so bad.”

“So you came here to tell me to get over it? To tell me that it’s fine I was abandoned by my colleagues, that I was looked at with disdain?”

“No, that’s not it. You know, talking about it like this is the only reason I realized it, but I had friends. Well, actually, not people I’d want to call ‘friends,’ but people who, even when I wanted to be left alone, kept coming up to me day after day after day. I have those kinds of people in my life even now. So maybe... Maybe I chose to stay in Japan because I had people like that.”

“I... no longer have friends like that.”

“But we’re here. For now... what I want to say... is that even if you can’t do something by yourself, if you have someone there who’s helping drag you along, then it’s only a matter of time before you find yourself back on the right track...”

“Fufu, Ayumu is pretty terrible at explaining things. What you’re trying to say isn’t coming across at all.”

“Well, sorry.”

“But, I think that what you’re trying to say is the same as what Haruna told me.”

“Haruna? What did she say to you?”

-

“Failure isn’t falling down, it’s falling down and failing to get back up! You’re still alive, aren’t you?! I don’t know what you did, but stop acting so worn out and feel better already! Even if you can’t do it, I’ll do it for

you, so don't worry!"

-

"That's what she said."

"Well, she's as patronizing as ever..."

"But you agree with her, don't you?"

"...Well, yeah, more or less."

"Fufu... it's alright. I'm fine..."

Drip. Drop. Tears began to fall from Sera's eyes.

"But... I'm not longer accepted as a vampire ninja. I made a decision for myself, chose to put friends above honor... But even then, I still want to continue living as a vampire ninja. My own decisions and my own determination... I was still too weak... That's what frustrates me the most!"

I put my hand on Sera's head and began to stroke her hair, but...

"Ayumu, that's sexual harassment."

Sera glared at me through teary eyes, and I let go of her.

But then, Sera suddenly jumped straight into my chest.

"Hey, hey, that's sexual harassment, you know."

"No... This is what people call 'service,' isn't it?"

Sera stifled her voice, and just cried while she held on tightly to my shirt.

And in the end, I went back to stroking her hair.

Part 2

I'm really not sure if I was able to cheer her up or not, but Sera told me, "I'm all right. I apologize for making you worry" and tied her hair back up into a ponytail, so I went back to my own room.

I saw Haruna on top of my bed, deeply absorbed in a strange book with the title "Knock Your Target Out with One Blow!" And the minute she saw me...

"Let's get started now!" she said, lifting away a few sheets from the futon.

It seemed that when you learned magic, there were certain formalities that had to be taken, so I did as I was told and waited for Haruna to finish her preparations... But something just didn't make sense to me.

"Haruna, can I be frank about something?"

Before I realized it, for some inexplicable reason I had been wrapped in the futon sheets, with only my right hand left sticking out.

"Hueh?"

"What's the point of doing all this?"

"So we should start with light magic. Because it's cool."

Ah, she completely ignored me. Why did I look like a mummy who had just been disturbed from his sleep?

"Zombies don't like light very mu--"

"Light Magic, 'Gallant Pose' is pretty nice, isn't it?!"³⁰

"Only heroes can use that magic, right?! Also, stop plagiarizing stuff from other works!"

“Ah, I see. Only heroes can use that. Well, let’s start with Light Magic, ‘Fist of the Sun!’”³¹

“That’s not magic! That’s martial arts! Though I guess calling it martial arts isn’t completely right...”

“All right! Let’s go steal some magical energy from fairies!”

“What do you have against fairies?!”

“I mean, even the Earth-bred Saiyan³¹ forcibly collected power and then tried to destroy the planet that lent him that power. It’s not about having something against someone or anything, my dear Watson.”

“But I don’t intend to go off and destroy a planet. Also, my name is Aikawa Ayumu.”

“Listen, Ayumu. There’s a lot to magic. Fundamentally, magic is using the magical energy inside you to make things happen, but the magical energy in Ayumu is mine, so if you use it I’ll kill you. So we’ll borrow magical energy from another source. Chants are just like reading aloud the contracts you form with those other sources of magical energy, so they’re absolutely necessary.”

“So, we have to borrow magical energy from fairies... But are there seriously fairies in this world?”

“Well, when Michael Jackson goes ‘Ohh!’ and ‘Ahh!’, he’s borrowing magical energy from fairies.”

“That’s a magical incantation?!”

“Feels like he doesn’t realize it himself though.”

Maybe all those superhuman-ish people like Ichiro³² were really using magic...

“So, first you learn the chant.”

Haruna first made a few weird noises that I couldn’t make head nor tails of, and then in the end...

“Shararararararaaaan!”

She thrust her arm out in front of her. What a crude-sounding chant...

“So yeah, it’s like that. You can whisper most of it, but the end should definitely get some force put into it. If you say it all loudly, though, your opponent will know what kind of magic you’re going to use, so be careful.”

Her lecture having ended, I quickly began to mumble, and then,

“Shararararararaaaan.”

Swish. I held out my hand, and sweat oozed out onto my palm... That’s disgusting.

What the hell was that? Did the magic work? It was all slimy...

Huh? It kinda smelled nice. Almost like fish broth or something...

“Idiot! You left out one of the ‘ra’s! That changes the meaning of the incantation!”

“What did that incantation mean, then...?”

I wiped the sweat-like substance in my right hand on the sheets.

“Hueh? Umm, well...”

-

“Excuse me, could I add on an order of butajiru?” ³³

“Huh? Brazil?”

“No, butajiru.”

“...Brazil?”

“No, just give me some tonjiru.” ³³

“Ah! I apologize. My ears are a bit bad.”

"No, I apologize too for making it difficult to understand."

*So, one order of kenchinjiru!*³⁴

"..... Okay, fine."

-

"That's what that chant meant."

"That's almost like a true story! That's really nonfiction for a chant!"

"Shut up! This happened because Ayumu messed up!"

So the stuff that oozed out onto my hand was kenchinjiru...

"So what was it supposed to mean then?!"

"Hueh? Umm, let's see... 'You, take that which is called the Blue Flame-'"

"Wait, wait! That first part is completely different! There's that much of a difference from just one 'ra'?!"

"Of course! For example, in Japanese, 'chauchau' and 'chaunchau' have only one letter different but they mean completely different things!"³⁵

W-what persuasive power she has!

"Also, don't I have to have my masou renki before using magic?"

"This isn't attack magic."

I see. If it wasn't attack magic, I could use it without having the masou renki. Hm? So could I become a magician now? A magician who could make kenchinjiru ooze out onto his hands?

That didn't sound like something to be proud of at all. But, seriously, to think that changing one syllable could make the outcome so different...

“Well, what happens if I leave out another ‘ra’?”

“Hm, why don’t you try?”

I didn’t want to chant that crude chant too loudly, so I began to mumble again, and in the end I spoke a bit more loudly.

“Sharararaaaaan.”

Light began to sparkle from both my hands. The minute I looked at that dazzling light, I realized that it was sunlight... And at the same time, I lost consciousness.

F-Fist of the Sun?!

Part 3

Once I recovered from my dead faint, I continued training with Haruna, but according to her, I was so talentless that I probably wouldn't be able to use any magic at all, let alone attack magic.

I hadn't even managed to reproduce that kenchinjiru spell after that first time.

Haruna went to take a bathroom break, and while she was gone, I tried one more time to produce more kenchinjiru, but I failed.

That's when it happened. *Ding dong!* It was very rare to hear our doorbell ring, but someone had just rang it.

Was it someone selling newspapers? A religious solicitation? Actually, the last time our doorbell rang, there was a trench-coat-wearing dog out there... Was it a demon? Was it a snake?

"Yeah, yeah. I'm coming." I walked down the stairs and headed for the front door. I tried to keep the chainsaw and the katanas in the umbrella stand out of sight as I opened the door a crack.

But nobody was there. When I looked down, though, I saw a cardboard box.

I looked around, but there was no hint of anyone else. Did they just ring the doorbell and run? And they left a really strange package, too.

I checked the packing slip, but there wasn't a sender listed or any explanation of its contents.

I thought long and hard about what to do with such a suspicious-looking package, but in the end I just shut the door.

It would have been crazy to take such a clearly shady thing inside. I knew that wouldn't end well.

On the way back to my room, I saw Haruna come out of the bathroom.

“Huh? Didn’t my package get here?”

“Did you order something?”

So that package was something from Virie?

“Yeah... I mean, that leaf woman has gotten pretty hopeless, so... I thought I would teach her how to cook personally.”

“Ahh... So these are ingredients?”

“Yeah. It’s something from this world and it looks pretty easy... Umm, stratti, I think? Or no, it was spa-something-tee...”

“You mean spaghetti?”

“No! Ayumu, you’re seriously an idiot! The book I was reading said that people who forget the ‘h’ are dumbass fakes!”

“Ah, my fault. So you mean spaghetti.”

“Yeah, that, that. Yeah, that sounds about right.”

Seeming quite pleased with herself, Haruna threw open our front doors.

And who would have the heart to try and stop her when her ahoge was bouncing and she looked so happy? I could only watch her with cool eyes as she brought the cardboard box into the house.

Well, if it was just ingredients for spaghetti...

Haruna peeled off the packing tape and opened the package. There was a violin inside.

“What the hell.”

I accidentally spoke what I was thinking out loud.

“Making something like this into noodles... The people of this world

sure are crazy.”

“Exactly where do you see noodles in that?”

“Ah, there’s dried noodles here on this part? Hm, there isn’t very much at all. What a high-class ingredient this must be! Fits me perfectly!”

Now that she mentioned it, she was always using high-class ingredients... But those were just the violin strings.

“No, this is actually-“

“Ayumu, did someone come?”

That was when Sera appeared with her arms crossed.

When I saw that her eyes were a bit red, I guessed that she had still been crying.

I tried to cheer her up, laughing as I showed her the violin.

“Take a look. It’s a violin that Haruna mistook for spaghetti-“

“It *is* spaghetti! Ugyahh!”

Haruna thrust out both her hands. She didn’t seem to want to back down on that point.

“Oh? It’s a Stradivarius replica. That sure brings back memories...”

I probably looked pretty confused when Sera said “Stradivarius replica,” because she gave me a scornful look.

“Please tell me you’ve at least heard of Stradivarius.”

“Ah, umm... Something like Romanée-Conti?”³⁶

“...What a disgusting way to think.”

“Well, they’re similar right? They’re both really high-class things.”

“This is a normal violin that was modeled after the Stradivarius

violins. But they're very good violins. The coating of varnish is very carefully done, and it isn't immediately obvious, but if you played it, you could see that the craftsmanship is just lovely. It's quite a violin."

Sera softly cradled the violin in her arms and nodded as she inspected it.

"Ukyaahh!! They sent me the wrong thing!"

Haruna let out a weird shout. Well, in the end, she probably made a mistake with the name and ordered the wrong thing. I mean, spaghetti and Stradivarius did sound simi... Wait, no, they didn't. They didn't at all. At best they sounded vaguely alike.

"Nyahahaha! Look at this! I asked them for 'Antonio Spaghetti,' but they sent me 'Antonio Stradivarius!'"

Haruna laughed and showed me the packing receipt.

The price was... sixty thousand myan. What kind of currency was that? Sounded kind of cute though.

Also, I really wondered what "Antonio Spaghetti" would taste like...

No matter how I thought about it, it was probably Haruna who made the mistake during the ordering process. But when I saw her mumbling things like, "Geez, what should I do..." and "Well, this isn't good..." I decided to not be tactless and point that out.

"So, Sera can play the violin?"

"Yes. Back in the village, I was in a band with my comrades..."

Sera looked truly sad. Crap. Bringing up anything that had to do with her vampire ninja companions was taboo.

Perhaps she saw my worried expression, because Sera gave me a bright smile. But I could tell that her smile was completely forced.

Don't be silly, Sera... If she wasn't cooking, Sera never smiled like that. Instead, she always had a beautifully commanding and stoic

expression on her face.

That's why I could feel a tightening in my chest.

"Well, it was just for fun. I wanted to train my blade, but a superior invited me, so I couldn't refuse."

Sera traced the violin strings with a finger. Her expression was gentle, almost like she had found a kitten in the street.

I passed Sera the bow.

"Hm? What?"

"Ah, I was wondering if you wanted to play."

"I refuse. Those hopeful eyes of yours have made me lose my will to play."

But this flow of events was clearly leading to her playing... Well, whatever. If she didn't want to, then she didn't want to.

I returned the bow to the cardboard box, a slightly sour expression on my face.

Haruna was still poring over the documents. Actually, I wondered if she could play an instrument too.

"Haruna, can you play any instruments?"

"O-of course I can! Like keyboard harmonicas..."

"Can you play anything other than stuff like 'Chopsticks'?"

"Don't make fun of me! I can play 'Monkey Gorilla Chimpanzee,' or 'The Demon's Underwear,' or anything else!"

"Learn the real names for those songs, dammit."³⁷

"Well, I can also do 'Cool-Headed Continent!'"

Put some passion into it, dammit!³⁸

“Ah, ‘Cool-Headed Continent’... I can do that one too.”

You too, Sera?! Well, granted, the name did suit her pretty well...

“Well, how about you play it for us then?”

“Don’t wanna.”

Dammit!

Part 4

After my magic training, I walked around outside until five in the morning. But even though I searched so hard, I couldn't even find a single vampire ninja, let alone a Megalo.

When Yuu was here with us, every day some random monster appeared on our doorstep... But perhaps that really was because Yuu's emotions were leaking out.

But for now, I returned home empty-handed.

Ugh, I'm so hungry.

I headed for the living room, but nobody was there. That empty living room really made me feel lonely. Yuu had always been in the living room before. I had only been with Yuu for around a month, but... These feelings, I wondered what they meant...

Once again, I felt something rumbling in my chest... I suddenly felt I needed to get a drink.

I headed for the kitchen and opened the refrigerator, but there was nothing inside.

Should I go to the store? No, it was fine. I should go prepare for school.

I went up the stairs, and just as I was about to go back to my room, I heard something.

It was some kind of music. When I went to Sera's room and took a peek inside... I saw that within that room was a beauty playing the violin.

This song... I felt like I'd heard it somewhere... Maybe...

Ah! It was that song! The song that plays when the Wild Shogun

goes wild!³⁹ You know, when he walks down the hall and just cuts people down as he goes along.

So it looked like she really did want to play the violin...

...I should leave her be. I gently closed the door. When I went out into the hallway, I realized that Sera's violin was not the only sound filling the air; there was also music flowing from Haruna's room.

I see; there were different songs mixing in the air from both sides, so I didn't realize that Sera was playing the Wild Shogun song until I opened her door.

All right, next, I'd go see what song Haruna was playing.

I started to open her door, when I heard a voice.

"Haa ahh ahh ahhhh... dobidobaa-baraaaah~."

Crap! That was the last part! I had missed the opening to Full House!⁴⁰

"Haruna!"

I opened the door with tears in my eyes. It was a strangely nostalgic song, and I suddenly really wanted to hear it again.

I'd ask her to sing it over again from the first "Haa ahh ahh ahhhh.... hahhh~~" part.

For some reason, Haruna was standing in the middle of the room holding a keyboard harmonica, wearing nothing but a single pair of light-blue checkered panties.

Wasn't that my little brother's keyboard harmonica? How nostalgic...

"Haruna... What do you think you're doing in that getup?"

"A-Ayumu? Why did you come in without knocking again?! You damn Rockman Eros!"

Was that the X version of Rockman? She didn't go for "Erockman" instead?

She quickly picked up the camisole she had tossed on the bed and used it to cover her chest.

I turned my back to Haruna.

"So, what exactly are you doing naked?"

And even though I was being considerate by turning my back to her, she hit me with a flying kick. That damn bastard.

"You damn Eros-men! Triple Eros!"

Well, if she just wanted names with "X" in them, there were plenty of those. She continued to stomp heavily on my back, and I just lay there and took it. Her anger seemed to finally abate, and she took a deep breath.

"I woke up and was changing... And then I found this."

Haruna blew into the keyboard harmonica.

Even if she was in the middle of changing, she would drop what she was doing if she found something interesting... Well, I had to admit, that was quite like Haruna.

I turned back towards Haruna and clasped my hands together.

"Sorry, could you play that song again from the beginning?"

"Eh? ...No. You're just going to make fun of me."

Haruna had finished changing into her camisole-and-panties form, and she stuck her tongue out at me. I was appreciating her cute light-blue checkered panties, but my view was suddenly blocked by her camisole.

"I won't make fun of you."

"Well, then..."

Haruna positioned the keyboard harmonica, looking almost as if she was about to blow into a trumpet. Her ahoge waved back and forth in quarter time like a conductor's baton.

The sound she produced defeated the purpose of playing a keyboard harmonica. Indeed, it didn't sound like a keyboard harmonica at all, but rather almost like a piano.

And then, at some point, it started to sound like an organ.

And then... it finally started sounding like a trumpet.

...Finally my ass! Was I an idiot?! Also, how the hell was a keyboard harmonica sounding like a trumpet?!

Also, she wasn't playing the Full House opening... That was definitely the Hagure Keiji Junjouha opening now!⁴¹

.....But, I mean, I didn't hate it.

Once Haruna finished playing one piece, I lightly applauded.

"Haruna, you..." I started, but Haruna stared at me straight on.

"You're going to make fun of me, aren't you?"

I shook my head.

"No, that was good. I was thinking that you're really a prodigy when it comes to music."

Haruna blushed and averted her gaze. She looked embarrassed. Her ahoge looked like it was taking a guts pose, though, so she was probably secretly pretty proud of herself.

Perhaps she was in a good mood now, but Haruna tossed her hands up.

"Well, next I'll play my original song then, 'Polyester of the Jomon Period.'"⁴²

What was that about?! I really wanted to hear!

Part 5

As we were going about doing weird things, the clock ticked past six. The summer sun rose early, so if I didn't hurry I wouldn't be able to make it in time.

If you wanted to know if it was safe for a zombie to walk outside, it was much more useful to look at the ground than the sky.

If people's shadows weren't visible, it was fine. If the shadows were sharply visible, then it was completely a no-go.

At that time, it was... safe. I hurried to school and snuck into my classroom.

Tomonori was sleeping in my seat. By this point, she always tried to get to school at the same time as I did. She probably got tired of waiting for me.

I sat in the seat in front of her quietly, trying not to wake her, and gave off a yawn.

Tomonori sure looked pretty silly when she was sleeping...

I fished through my pencil case, thinking that maybe I would doodle on her face, but Tomonori suddenly stretched her arms and started mumbling.

"Mnyahh... I can't eat another bite~~..."

What a clichéd thing to say in your sleep.

"W-who are you?! You tricked me, didn't you! My archnemesis...!"

Did she get drugged or something?!

"No, you've got the wrong person."

"Double sarcasm?!"⁴³

I had intended to only retort in my head so I didn't wake her, but I ended up saying that comeback out loud.

"A-Aikawa... You're really late..."

Yawn. Tomonori gave a shamelessly big yawn and rubbed her eyes.

"Sorry for waking you up when you were sleeping so soundly..."

"...Did you at least kiss me? Ehehehe..."

She gave off a snicker like Muttley from Wacky Races.⁴⁴

"I'm not Orito, so I wouldn't do something as barbaric as that."

"I know, I knoooww... It was a joke!"

She just woke up, but she sure was hyper... You know, it's still six in the morning...

"Ah, Aikawa. Did you remember the potatoes?"

Potatoes?

"Why potatoes?"

"... Aikawa, you... Did you forget that we have the cooking lessons today?"

I searched far and wide through my memory until I finally hit upon the conversation I had with Tomonori at the end of gym about the cooking lessons.

"... Ah!"

And then, I remembered what Tomonori had said: that I shouldn't forget to bring potatoes...

I had completely, utterly forgotten.

"Sorry! I'm seriously sorry!"

I clasped my hands in front of me and bowed my head.

“Well, it’s fine. This feels like something Aikawa would do, after all.”

Tomonori sighed, but she grinned as she laughed.

Part 6

Now, there are some that question whether cooking lessons are actually necessary.

However, let me just take a chance and say it: yes, they are.

I think that home economics is more important than gym class for productive members of society.

After all, nobody can live without eating!

I wanted to scream that to the heavens, but this was probably because I had suffered through Sera's cooking. Either way, normal students were still opposed to this class.

Well, I admit, it wasn't really an interesting class.

In the end, it was the kind of class that was completely dominated by experienced people. In other words, the women had the captain's chair, and us laymen just chatted in the corner while we waited for the meal to finish.

Was there really any other class that was so boring? Well, yeah, there was...

We separated into our respective teams and gathered at the sink. Everyone I had seen at gym class was present.

There was the pigtailed beauty, Hiramatsu. The graceful way in which she carried herself kind of reminded me of Yuu.

Next, there was Mihara with her long, light brown hair, though her hair had been tied up during the basketball match. Her sleeves were rolled up and she seemed brimming with motivation, but she probably just wanted to beat Tomonori.

And then there was the tall one, Shimomura. He had large hands, a

large build, a tight body and a handsome face. He looked nothing like a Japanese person, and so his nickname was Anderson.

And then there was Tomonori... and that damn Orito.

For some reason, Orito's apron came with disgusting frills. I had forgotten about today, so I was participating with the jersey I had brought to use for gym class.

"Well, today we're going to prep some fish..."

As the teacher in charge of the class, known as "Boring Hurricane," explained the plan for the class to us, I poked Orito with my elbow.

"What the hell is up with that apron?"

"This? I mail-ordered it. I wanted to get Sera-san to wear it for me."

"Naked apron, huh? You should probably quit. Tokyo Bay is going to be dyed red with your blood."

"Don't be an idiot, Aikawa. This isn't a normal apron. It's part of a maid uniform!"

"Hm, I wonder why I'm the one who just got called an idiot..."

"Hey! Over there! Stop being gross!"

"Sensei, that's a rather strange way to get angry."

Anderson raised one of his long hands up and protested.

The teacher in charge of the class, known as "Colorless Typhoon," coughed once.

"Well, to be honest, we had planned for Unabara-sensei from the Gourmet Club to be here, but he said he had to drop a hint to his son or something and suddenly couldn't make it⁴⁵. It was a last-minute cancellation."

"Awww..." Disappointed voices were heard all round. They sure had hired someone really famous to come...

“And, well, I was a bit worried I wouldn’t be able to find a replacement, but Yoshida introduced me to someone.”

In front of me, Tomonori hummed with pride.

For a second, I wondered if she had called in a vampire ninja, but...

“Well then, sensei, please come in.”

Cling clang cling clang. At the sight of the person who came in, my face twisted so much that my nose probably looked like a pig’s snout.

“Cute~~.” “So small~!” The girls in the room let out shrill squeals.

“She’s pretty cute.” “Man, look at that ahoge.” “Well, that’s just...” The boys in the room let out darkish voices.

The person standing on the teaching platform was a 145-cm-tall girl. She had huge, cat-like eyes. Her chestnut, shoulder-length hair and the ahoge standing tall on the top of her head were her trademarks.

And her name was...

“I’m the genius bishoujo demon baroness masou shoujo Haruna-chan!”

A huge wave of applause broke through the room.

“Haruna-chan, exactly what are you supposed to be?”

Haruna immediately got a slightly teasing question thrown at her.

“It’s as you see... I’m a soldier!”

I really wanted to ask her to start the lecture by teaching us where it was that she looked like a soldier...

Suddenly, a wave of laughter broke out. Well, I guess if she wasn’t being an annoyance, Haruna was actually pretty cute. Even if she acted in that kind of crazy way, people could just laugh it off.

“I’m giving your lecture today, so be grateful, yeah?!”

“Master! Please teach us!”

Tomonori raised her voice; it looked like she was having fun.

“Harunachaan~~. It’s me. Throw me your panties!”

And Orito was screwing around. Ask that again after you’ve collected all the Dragonballs.

I just stood, alone, and held my head in my hands.

All right, time to do my best to make it seem like Haruna and I didn’t know each other. I’d try to hide so she doesn’t see me.

“Today, we’ll be focusing on stewing mackerel with miso. For short, we’re going to be making a dish called ‘To Your Soba’⁴⁶. The ingredients are mackerel, dark-brown miso paste, and sake. Ahh, and afterwards, we’re also going to make miso soup and fried eggs.”

“Sensei, if it’s called ‘To your Soba,’ wouldn’t we be making soba and not mackerel?”

“Shut up! Go die!”

She didn’t respond to questions. As expected from Haruna.

“All right, let’s start with ‘Dokidoki Survival Niichan.’”⁴⁷

“She changed the name.” “This is starting to seem unreasonable...” “Isn’t that new dish name even longer than the original name?” “She probably just wants to shorten it to ‘Sabani.’” “You’re a piece of work, you know that...?”

I heard whispers all around me. But Haruna didn’t seem to mind at all, starting to list out the recipe on the blackboard. She wrote everything too low, so it was hard to see, so the teacher in charge of the class, known as “Worthless,” began to rewrite it higher up.

“Well, for the miso soup, you can just make it how you like it, but the problem is the fried egg. People who don’t take fried eggs

seriously will definitely die within a hundred years, so make sure you pay attention!”

Nobody retorted anymore. It wasn’t because they were ignoring her; it was more that people were having fun watching that small creature huff-and-puff around.

“You there! What do you usually put on your fried egg?!”

“Soy sauce for me.”

“What about you?”

“Worcestershire sauce.”

“This class is filled with idiots. What about you?”

“Just salt.”

Haruna slammed her hand on the blackboard.

“All of you are worthless! Listen! You put your *life* in fried eggs!”

Haruna began to give an impassioned speech, beating her hand on her small chest.

“Breathe your soul into it! Even if you end up dying within a hundred years!”

Wait, then we’ll die within a hundred years either way...

“Sensei~.”

“What?!”

“Could it be that you’ve made fried egg for Aikawa before?”

I couldn’t really tell exactly who had asked that question. If I could, I would’ve gifted that person a zombie punch later.

A wave of commotion broke out. Once, my classmates had the fortune to enjoy the Aikawa Household’s Ultimate Fried Eggs. And with Orito and Tomonori’s contributions to the conversation as well

as Haruna's impassioned speech, someone probably got the idea to ask that question.

"Well, of course! After all, we live-"

"Whatever, just start the lesson already!!"

I shouted out, trying to interrupt Haruna... And in the meantime, I hid behind Anderson, trying to not be seen.

Part 7

I had interrupted Haruna before she could tell people that we lived together, but that just delayed the inevitable.

The girls in the class surrounded Haruna-sensei and, almost as if they were interviewing an actor who had just gone public with his relationship, they started grilling her about her relationship with me.

Orito, the other boys (who had been left out), and myself just stood in the corner and chatted.

There might have been six people on a team, but we still didn't have anything else to do.

"So, which one does Aikawa like better?"

"Shut up, dammit."

By "like better," he meant between Haruna and Tomonori.

"Plus, just the other day, that really pretty woman came to give Aikawa his lunch..."

"Ah! You're right! Her face and her style were both top-notch."

"Gegeh!"

"That person was Sera-san."

"H-how do you know that, Orito?!"

"Sera and Haruna... They're more like family."

"So Aikawa's favorite is Tomonori?! Ugh, I was going for Tomonori too...!"

"You liked Tomonori?"

"I mean, just look at those legs. Drives me crazy."

"Tomonori might look like that, but she has a huge set of breasts on her."

"H-how do you know that, Orito?!"

"Gegeh!"

"But if she has big breasts, wouldn't that mean Aikawa isn't into her?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"After all, Aikawa is a lolicon."

Don't say that all together, dammit. Why the hell did they all decide I was a lolicon?

"But there's also another pretty girl living at Aikawa's house. Her name is Yuu."

"H-how do you know that, Orito?!"

"Gegeh!"

Why is there a guy who hasn't said anything other than "gegeh"...?

They were so annoying that I went off to talk with Tomonori and Anderson-kun.

"How's it going?"

I asked Anderson-kun how things were.

"Here you go. Say 'ahhhhh'..."

Ahhh. Anderson-kun opened his mouth wide, and I joined him, doing the same. Anderson-kun fed me a mouthful of miso soup. Hmm, it was pretty good.

"H-how is it?"

Tomonori looked at me with upturned eyes, seeming worried. Did Tomonori make this? So this was the taste of Tomonori's home cooking...

"I quite like how this tastes."

"You didn't say it was delicious... But I'm glad."

Tomonori let out a sigh of relief, and I scratched my head.

"This miso soup is delicious. It reminds me of my hometown."

Anderson-kun crossed his arms and seemed pretty serious. I wondered where his hometown was...

"Isn't that nice? Aikawa says he liked it. You'll be fine when you get married."

Mihara patted Tomonori on the head.

"I mean, I'm already married."

"So, does Aikawa like Haruna-sensei or Yuki-chan better?"

It seemed like I wouldn't be able to escape from that line of conversation. And I guess the girls who knew Tomonori well called her Yuki instead.

That was why Tomonori always yelled at people when they called her Tomonori: because there were people on the other side who called her something completely different. If everyone called her Tomonori, then she would probably just resign herself to it...

"If you asked me to choose my favorite Yasuura sister from Hagure Keiji, I would have to say I like Yuka-san."

"Ah, she's played by Ogawa Noriko, right? I like her too."

Anderson-kun... You really are a good person.

"U-Umm... Aikawa-kun... Umm... This can... Could you open it?"

Hiramatsu was the essence of the perfect girl as she called out to me

with a soft voice and handed me a can of oranges.

“If Hiramatsu is here, this team can’t fail.”

“That’s... That’s not true...”

She seemed to be pretty poor at talking to people while making eye contact, so she kept her eyes cast downwards.

“Haruna-sensei~~. Aikawa-kun is hitting on Hiramatsu-san~~.”

Mihara looked like she was enjoying herself as she called Haruna over.

Haruna slipped by all the students, carrying herself like Allen Iverson as she rushed up to our team. And then she began to kick me repeatedly.

“You don’t care, do you?! You’ll just hit on anything, as long as it’s a human?! You a zombie?!”

Dropkick, dropkick, dropkick. I tried to get up, but Haruna just dropkicked me again and a wave of applause broke out.

“Sensei, the food is gathering dust, so maybe you should...”

Anderson-kun calmed Haruna down, and she washed her hands.

You’re really a good person, Anderson-kun. You saved me back there.

“Haruna-sensei, what kind of guys do you like?”

Mihara, who was hugging Tomonori, raised her hand and asked that question.

“Hueh? I guess people who call The World’s Nabeatsu ‘Jarism’s Watanabe.’”⁴⁸

“What about Yuki?”

“Huh? Well... I like a guy who knows the difference between a torque-tuned motor and a rev-tuned motor.”⁴⁹

Tomonori-san, you're amazing! I shook Tomonori's hand with both my own.

"All right! Tomonori takes this round!"

"I-I... I lost..."

Haruna's lips thinned in dissatisfaction. Her ahoge drooped.

Haruna glared, but Tomonori didn't seem to be at all aware of what was going on. I was thrown unceremoniously in the middle of that situation, and so a love triangle was born.

"It's a fight! It's a fight!"

The students gathered around and smiled, seeming to be having fun.

"Time for a match! You versus me!"

"Me have a match with Master? No no, I can't. There's no way I would be able to win."

Tomonori gave Haruna a smile as she fanned her hand back and forth.

"Eh? Really? I guess that's true. Nyahaha."

Ah, she seemed to be in a bit of a better mood.

"Then, we'll see who can make the best fried egg!"

Haruna thrust a finger at Tomonori. Even if she was in a better mood, it didn't look like she had given up on having a match with Tomonori.

And in the fried egg battle that followed, two towering personalities emerged.

On one hand, Tomonori seemed almost like someone who chose to enjoy every moment of her life, smiling even as she cracked her eggs.

It was almost like she was playing a game.

She concentrated on adding the cream or putting in some dashi, steadily pushing onward with her cooking.

On the other hand, Haruna's shoes squeaked on the floor as she took one step forward and one step back, pivoting around here and there. It looked incredibly pointless... It was almost like she was playing a game.

"What are you doing?"

"If you walk more than three steps while you hold the egg then it's travelling, right?!"

Was someone going to blow a whistle on her or something?!

"Hyahh!!"

She tossed the egg... but not at the stainless steel bowl that had been set down right in front of her. She threw the egg at the bowl on the teacher's platform.

"A fade away shot?!"

Mihara and Anderson-kun, both on the basketball team, let out a yell of surprise. Anderson-kun sounded almost American when he pronounced that.

"Get the rebound! The egg's gonna spill!"

Everyone gulped as they watched the egg draw a pretty arc through the air.

"Be quiet. This sound... It revitalizes me. Again and again."⁵⁰



Clang. The egg hit the rim of the bowl. And then it cracked perfectly.

Cheers erupted in the room. The boy closest to the teacher's

platform timidly checked on the bowl's contents.

"T-This is... There's not a single piece of shell in the bowl! And the egg is already stirred!"

"That's... impossible..." I was the one who said that. I mean, that was impossible no matter how you thought about it, right?

Haruna closed her eyes and looked up at the ceiling as the cheers washed over her. It seemed like she was letting the approval of her audience sink in.

"Also, wasn't that just a three pointer?"

"No... That wasn't just a three pointer."

"Huh?"

"Haruna-sensei shot that from a meter behind the three-point line. So..."

"The NBA three-point line."

Anderson-kun muttered in English with perfect pronunciation. He really wasn't Japanese, was he?

Haruna had already won over the hearts of the spectators. Even Mihara and Anderson-kun had already joined the Haruna camp. Nobody doubted that Haruna already had this match in the bag.

"Amazing! Master is amazing!"

Tomonori's eyes sparkled as she stared at Haruna. She didn't seem frustrated at all. Though if Haruna were in her position, she would be in a pretty bad mood at this point...

At that moment, something happened. There was a poisonous snake in the bowl that Tomonori was using for her eggs!

"Uwaah! It's a snake!"

And after that, not a single student was left around Tomonori.

"I saw it! When she shot that three pointer, Haruna-sensei did a behind-the-back pass and put that snake in there!"

"Stop with the accusations! She shot that with both hands, didn't she?!"

I heard the spectators begin to talk.

"Haruna, be honest. Did you put that in there?"

I questioned Haruna with a bit of anger in my voice.

When I did that, Haruna began to walk away from me while whistling innocently.

That girl was... There is a limit to how shameless you can be...

"Haruna--"

"It's fine, Aikawa. It's rude to doubt Master!"

"Tomonori... You..."

"I'll just start it all over."

Haruna was obviously bullying her, but Tomonori didn't seem to mind a bit... Or, rather, maybe she was just too nice to notice. Or no, that wasn't it. It was, more simply, that she was an idiot.

"... What's up with that girl...?"

On the other hand, Haruna, the bully, seemed unhappy about how things were going.

Tomonori began to fry her eggs, humming a bit. Haruna just watched her with her arms crossed.

And it was at that time! The poisonous snake from before, drenched in egg, slithered right under Haruna! Watch out, Haruna! What in the world was going to happen?!

"Haruna-sensei!"

The climax scene between the mongoose and the viper began. Haruna dropped to her hands and knees, beginning to kick and struggle.

“Master! Are you alright?!”

Tomonori reached out to try and save Haruna, but the snake hissed at her and she cowered back.

“Don’t worry! Don’t mind me and just fry it already!”

“Master...” Tomonori seemed choked with emotion.

“Tomonori, your eggs are burning.”

I shook my head in resignation, and Tomonori turned right back to her eggs.

“Eh? Ahh! They’re already burnt!”

“Do your best, Haruna-sensei!” “Don’t lose, Haruna-sensei!”

Cheers for Haruna rang out. Her apron was drenched in egg as she continued her life-or-death struggle with the snake.

And then...

“I seriously have to start over?!”

At Tomonori’s dejected shout, Haruna stood straight up.

“Voila. All done.”

She clapped her hands together. Don’t tell me... She was staged that entire event so that Tomonori would burn her eggs again?

What a vindictive person... Plus, when the hell did she finish her fried eggs?!

“So this is what it means to risk your life for fried eggs...”

“Haruna-sensei used the heat from her life-or-death struggle with the snake to fry her eggs, didn’t she?”

The audience was filled with nothing but idiots. Haruna put her hands arrogantly on her hips. She puffed out her tiny chest, and her ahoge bounced from side to side.

“Everyone, please try that with your own fried eggs!”

“Like we could!”

It wasn’t even about the poisonous snake. There was no way anybody could cook a fried egg like that!

And with that, two types of fried eggs were set in front of us. Tomonori’s fried eggs were burnt, but Haruna’s fried eggs were a beautiful yellow color.

At that point, the teacher in charge who was neglecting his professional duties, known as “Exdeath was engulfed by the Void!”⁵¹ came over to check on us.

“Oh? You finished? Let me see...”

Without anyone holding her back, he took a bite of Haruna’s fried egg. And her eyes widened.

“Who made this? She would make a pretty good wife.”

Sorry, Sensei, but she wouldn’t make a good wife at all. She’s terrible at all other kinds of housework.

The students followed the teacher, taking out their chopsticks.

Everyone reached for Haruna’s fried egg, leaving Tomonori’s fried egg completely alone.

“Delicious!” “It’s like my tongue is alive.” “There’s a shock running through my entire body!”

A flood of approval washed through the room.

“Of course! It’s such a masterpiece I want to feed it to that gloomy necromancer!”

Haruna laughed like she was king of the world and put her hands on her hips.

Nobody ate Tomonori's eggs, so Haruna was the winner. Well, of course. It wasn't just Tomonori... I don't think anybody could take on Haruna here.

I thought that Tomonori might resent her defeat, but...

"This is delicious! As expected from Master! Amazing!"

She had already forgotten about the competition. And like that, all my classmates reached out their chopsticks, and Haruna's fried eggs disappeared in the blink of an eye.

"You idiots! Ayumu hasn't tried them yet! Ugh!"

"I can eat your cooking anytime, so it's fine."

"This time it's different! These are 'Gloomy Eggs'!⁵² So Ayumu has to try some!"

So she improved the eggs for Yuu... I see. I guess Haruna was also trying to think of ways to get Yuu to stay with us.

"Well, you can just make them again then."

"Ugh. You better eat some next time... And then you'll tell her about how delicious it was?"

"Yeah, of course."

"Then all right!"

"Master! What about mine? I made my eggs for my Master!"

Tomonori gave Haruna a smile and held out her burned eggs.

Haruna sent some of Tomonori's eggs into her mouth, crossed her arms, and waved her ahoge around.

"A thousand..."

“A thousand?”

“...and six hundred thirty-five points.”

”Out of how many points!?”

All sixty people in the room shouted that in harmony.

“The eggs aren’t soft enough. You stirred them too much, put too much cream in, put too much dashi in...”

Haruna began to list the dish’s shortcomings.

“...But I like it. So... A thousand and six hundred thirty-five points.”

“Ah, but I still haven’t finished the dish yet.”

Tomonori said that and dumped a giant glob of salad dressing on her eggs.

Haruna took a bite of Tomonori’s finished fried eggs and groaned a bit.

“Fifteen to twenty points.”

”That’s a huge difference!!”

“T-that’s great isn’t it Aikawa? Twenty points is pretty much a full score on a vision test...”

“But this isn’t a vision test. Your glass is way too full.”

“Ugh, dammit! I’ll hammer the right way of doing things into your head from square one! ...What’s your name?”

I was in awe. To think Haruna would ask somebody for their name... Had she really acknowledged Tomonori that much? That’s great. That meant she would probably stop all the pranks.

And like that, our cooking lesson came to an end without delay.

Lunch break began, and we separated into our groups to enjoy the things we had cooked.

“Here’s Ayumu’s share.”

“Oh? This is the dish you made for Yuu?”

“This... is for Ayumu. I read some books from this world and studied up!”

I see, so Haruna was able to change the taste of a dish depending on the person. Hm, let me see...

Mmm, Mandom.⁵³ What an adult flavor~~. It was a little more bitter than usual, but that was a nice thing. Unlike Sera, with Haruna cooking I could at least rest easy... ea... Brpp...

“Aikawa!”

I completely spat out everything that was in my mouth and fell forward.

“Ayumu? Ayumu! Hm? I definitely followed all the steps in here though...”

The book Haruna showed me was titled “Knock Your Target Out with One Blow!”

On the cover was a skinhead in sunglasses and a suit, hiding behind cover with an assault rifle.

You... That’s... “Knock your target out”... Doesn’t that mean to ki-

And that was the last thing I thought.

Part 8

When I groggily opened my eyes, I saw the familiar ceiling of the infirmary spread out above me.

I messed up. To think, it wasn't Sera this time; Haruna had failed at cooking...

I rose off of my back. When I did that, I saw Haruna, who was almost hanging over me as she slept.

"Haruna..."

"Hwah! Ayumu, when did you-?!"

Haruna suddenly woke up, eyes still half-lidded.

"You didn't do anything strange to me while I was sleeping, right?"

"I should be asking you the same question."

"Ah, I made a rabbit out of an apple, so eat up."

And what a wonderful rabbit it was. It was a really well-made rabbit, and looked so good it could have been sculpted out of wood. As always, she was a genius when it came to cooking.

So why had a genius like that copied Sera and fed me poison?

I asked Haruna that, and her ahoge drooped.

"That... was Ayumu's fault."

"Did I do something?"

"Ayumu went out on a date with that person! And so I thought I would knock you out..."

"But you didn't have to poison me. If you hate me that much, then

you could deal with it like you always do and-

“No, that’s wrong! Don’t get the wrong idea!”

“I got it, I got it. It’s not like you were jealous or anything.”

“...No, now I’m pretty sure you’re getting the wrong idea...”

“I couldn’t hear that. If you have something you want to say, make sure you say it clearly.”

Haruna fell into discontented silence.

Geez... Anyway, what time was it? I took out my cell phone and checked. It was... around the end of fifth period. I sure slept a while...

When I ate Sera’s cooking, I would be knocked out on the spot, but this time I could still move a bit after. Eating Sera’s cooking was even more dangerous than being poisoned, then. Noted.

Although... Haruna’s misunderstanding was also troubling.

“Haruna, if anybody else ate that, there would be no coming back from it, right? You should think a bit more before you act next time.”

“...I apologize.”

She was being almost unpleasantly sincere. I had been sure she would cut me down with a quick “Shut up!” or try to change the subject...

“I’m... really sorry.”

“It’s really a good thing I’m a zombie.”

“Yeah. But... I really just wanted you to enjoy the food. That’s... all.”

Haruna was near tears, so I bopped her on the head.

“Ukyah~!” Haruna’s body stiffened and she let out a small shriek.

“There. I forgive you.”

I gave Haruna a slightly teasing smile and stroked her head.

“Okay... I’m sorry.”

Had I ever seen Haruna apologize so sincerely like this before?

I wasn’t a psychic, so I had no way of knowing what had happened to her or what she was thinking right now. However, I could say one thing:

At some point, Haruna had matured to the point where she could act like a normal person.

Amazing. I would never be able to do something like that.

“Yoooo, Aikawa~~.”

Orito came in, and Haruna instantly turned away from me.

“W-well then... I have to go lecture the next class too.”

Haruna looked almost guilty as she passed by Orito and quickly left the infirmary. Orito watched her leave as he walked over to me and gave me a full smile.

I guess it was asking for too much to want Tomonori to come instead...

“Looks like you’re fine. Everyone was worried that you got sick and became a zombie or something.”

“No need to worry... I’m already one.”

“Your body really is way too weak, you know.”

Orito held out his fist.

“I’m really strong, actually. I’m just always holding back.”

In response, I bumped his fist with my own.

“Haruna-chan and Tomonori were both worried. They’re pretty cute when they get like that.”

“Yeah, that’s true.”

“But speaking of cute, I saw a reaaaally cute girl a bit earlier.”

“You always say that, though.”

“I think even a lolicon like Aikawa would agree. She has a pretty nice set of breasts too.”

“Ahh...”

I didn’t really care too much, so I just gave vague responses. I might have shown a bit more interest if she had small breasts, though.

“But I really didn’t know someone like that was a student here...”

Orito cocked his head to the side and casually uttered that one sentence. But that was enough to catch my interest.

Orito was a person who kept his head completely in the gutter. He always boasted that he had data on every single girl in the school, and that probably wasn’t a lie.

So, if there was a cute girl in the school that he didn’t recognize...?

For Orito... Yes, only for Orito... That was impossible.

“You’re sure she’s a student here?”

“Yeah, she was wearing a uniform.”

I couldn’t help but be interested after that. It could be a masou shoujo or a vampire ninja, but either way, it could be a clue to the location of Yuu or the King of the Night.

“What was she wearing?!” I was so worked up that I asked the question that he had just answered a minute ago.

“Huh? I told you, she was wearing our school’s uniform.”

Could it be a masou shoujo who could manipulate memories, or a vampire ninja who infiltrated the school?

“She had twin tails around shoulder-length like this, and she looked like a junior-high student... A loli, huge-breasted junior-high student.”

That description sounded familiar. I couldn't be certain with just that, but... It sounded like Kyouko.

It definitely could have been Kyouko.

But why? Why would she come here? She should know that I go to this school.

Maybe I was thinking too much? Dammit. I couldn't get it out of my mind now.

“Orito, where did you see that girl?”

“Where? Umm, in the hallway right before I came here.”

“I see. Thanks.”

I lightly raised my hand to him, got off the bed, and put on my shoes.

“The minute you hear about a loli character you go chasing after her. As expected of a lolicon.”

“I'm not a lolicon, dammit.”

The sound of people noisily chatting echoed nonstop through the hallway. I couldn't recognize a single face. It wasn't like I cared what kinds of students actually went to this school.

That meant I had no way to tell who Orito had been talking about. I went up and down the stairs and wandered around aimlessly.

Dammit. I should have brought Orito with me...

The sixth period bell rang, and the people in the hallways trudged

back to their classrooms like prisoners returning to their jail cells. I followed suit.

The teachers and students all went back to their classrooms. And then only myself and one girl were left.

That girl was someone I knew.

It looked like my instincts were right. Maybe I should think about becoming a detective? Zombie detective... That has a nice ring to it. The girl I was looking at gave me a smile.

“Good afternoon, Aikawa-san. You seem healthy. That’s too bad.”

It was a smile that you found yourself wanting to look at more, but I just glared.

“What a coincidence it must be to meet you here. What exactly are you scheming?”

“Ah, but Aikawa-san should know exactly what I’m scheming.”

“...Don’t tell me... The masou weapon?”

“Yes. It’s complete. Aikawa-san, you wanted to see it, right? He told me you did.”

When she mentioned it, I did remember saying that I wanted to take a look at it.

“Personally, I also would like Aikawa-san to see it. I won’t ever forget the trick you played on me back then.”

“Trick? I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“I won’t let you play dumb. That time when you switched a pornographic book with the weapon.”

Did something like that happen? I really couldn’t remember too well.

“So, because I wanted to see the despair on Aikawa-san’s face, I

chose this place as the testing ground for the weapon.”

She chuckled. She really did seem happy.

“So, are you the vessel they’re using for the weapon?”

“Vessel? You make little sense. Are you sure you’re not confusing the weapon with a spirit or something like that?”

Hm? What did she mean? Wasn’t the masou weapon that man with half a body that lived inside Tomonori?

“The weapon has already been activated. There is around six minutes left.”

What? It was on a timer? So this was not the kind of weapon I had expected... I see. Maybe Kyouko didn’t even know what the masou weapon looked like? If she had known that the masou weapon looked like a spirit, she probably wouldn’t have taken off with that porn book.

“Fufufu, even if you go looking for it now, do you think you can find it within six minutes? Well, please do try your best.”

Kyouko put her arms up in a victory pose, looking like one of those cute manager kouhai characters in TV dramas that looked up to their senpai.⁵⁴

But I took a step forward, suddenly rushing up to her.

“If you want a hint, I-“

Kyouko looked shocked and flew backwards. But I grabbed her uniform.

Kyouko’s plump breasts bounced up and down.

“Wha-“ Kyouko moved her lips and thrust me away from her.

“What are you thinking?! There’s not much time left to find the weapon! You shouldn’t be here worrying about me-“

"I definitely won't let you get away. No matter what else ends up happening."

"...You're the worst."

It's not like I wanted the weapon to go off. I just decided to chase after Kyouko instead after thinking about it.

Kyouko probably didn't want to be killed by the weapon either. If I could just keep Kyouko there for six minutes, I guessed that she would deactivate the weapon, even if she didn't want to.

So I would continue chasing Kyouko. I didn't have to beat her. I just had to catch her in the next six minutes.

Kyouko was leaping away, trying to get away from me.

I just continued following her, not making any kind of attack.

I thought that maybe I could just catch her by the arm, but...

No, that wasn't enough.

If it wasn't for her... If it wasn't for her, I wouldn't have died and Yuu wouldn't have left! It wasn't enough just to catch her. I would punch her lights out!

I stepped out with my left leg, putting all my power into my right hand as I sent my first flying into her face.

Kyouko snapped her fingers and a small tornado wrapped around my right hand. The tornado was made of blades.

My skin was shredded and blood flew into the air, but I didn't care. I just wanted my 600% attack to hit home.

I didn't manage a direct hit, though. My fist grazed Kyouko's cheek.

She sure dodged that well... Kyouko's crimson eyes looked right at me as she ground her teeth.

A tornado gathered in her right hand, and she thrust it into my

stomach like a drill.

This girl... She sure was strong.

But even if I hadn't transformed into a masou shoujo, I should be on equal footing with her.

As her hand gouged my stomach, I used my right hand and reached to push Kyouko's huge chest away from me.

"Bakamu! Right-lower!"

Right-lower? I heard a voice from behind me, and I glanced to the right and down.

The air was whirling around there. Dust was dancing in the air, as if the school hadn't been cleaned.

As soon as I noticed that, the air turned into tornadoes.

I had been completely taken in. Kyouko had used the blind spot I made when I thrust out my right arm to let an attack loose.

I was so unsure as to how I should deal with it that I even forgot that my name had just been combined with the word "baka."

"She's coming down from the left!"

Haruna's desperate voice rang in my ears. And as she spoke, Kyouko stopped moving.

There was no attack that came from the left as Haruna said.

I jumped left, but Kyouko blocked my retreat.

Kyouko prepared to come at me with a tornado sword.

"She's going to come in low from the right! Be careful!"

Haruna shouted at me. Kyouko glanced briefly at Haruna, and, for some reason, spun around. And then she, once again, looked at Haruna.

Next, Kyouko raised her right hand, when...

“Do it now, Ayumu! Punch her!”

I did as I was told, sending my fist flying through the air. Kyouko opened her mouth, as if she wanted to say something, but she didn't even try to dodge.

Huh? Was I really going to get away with punching her like this? Was it really that easy?

My fist hit Kyouko's cheek.

It was a surprisingly direct hit. I actually felt sort of anticlimactic. Perhaps because of that, I hadn't actually put too much power into the punch.

“How...” Kyouko looked at Haruna with sharp eyes.

“How can you read what I'm going to do?!”

Haruna just smiled and spoke, her voice brimming with confidence.

“Did you forget how many times we've fought against you?! Hey, Ayumu! She's going to try to run away to the right, so pay attention!”

Kyouko stopped in her tracks, a very sour look on her face.

“Sorry. But as it turns out, our Haruna is a genius.”

“How terrible. Well, in that case...”

Kyouko kicked off the hallway. She seemed to have decided to attack me straight on.

“Ayumu! Don't use your right hand!”

Right hand? I looked, and so I saw that there was a tornado coming at me from the right.

If I used my right hand, I would be taken in by that tornado.

I see, so she didn't care if Haruna could read her actions or not.

She just wanted to settle it with a direct confrontation. And I would only use my left hand.

All right, let's go!

The tornado swirled up right in front of my eyes. But I didn't mind it and sent out my left hand... Huh?

Kyouko wasn't there!

Crap. She wasn't coming to attack me, she was just trying to escape!

"I told you already! I can see through everything you do!"

When I turned around, I saw that Haruna had pinned Kyouko down.

Haruna-san, that was really cool, but I'm pretty sure that was the first time you said that!

"Beaten by Haruna... by the class dunce... by someone like you!"

"Nice one, Haruna. Looks like our battle with this one is finally coming to a close."

I firmly put Kyouko's arms behind her back and grabbed her hair. There were a mountain of things I wanted to ask her, but first I had to stop the weapon.

"So, deactivate the weapon. There's not much time left, right?"

"Ahahahaha."

"What's so funny?"

"I told you, didn't I? The weapon is already activated. Did you think I could stop it? It's pointless."

"You're going to die too, you know?"

"Do you know about the Gem of Life?"

I had completely forgotten. She had those Gems of Life that any human would love to have. They were ridiculous items that would make it fine even if she died, and if the weapon activated and everyone here was killed, only she would be able to revive.

Everyone was going to die... and it was my fault?

Mihara, Hiramatsu, Anderson-kun and Orito... and Tomonori.

And even Haruna?

I glanced at Haruna. Kyouko still had her arms behind her back, and Haruna wrapped her own hands around Kyouko's. Haruna's hands emitted a ruby light, and a halo of light appeared around Kyouko's hands, locking them into place.

I guess those were like handcuffs for masou shoujo.

"Haruna, could we save the people here with those Gems of Life?"

"If you're not a masou shoujo, you can't even touch them, so Ayumu and I could use them, but..."

Haruna used the same spell on Kyouko's legs, and Kyouko just lay on her side in the hallway, laughing all the while.

"All right, Haruna. Take all the Gems of Life from her."

"Ahahaha! That won't happen. Haruna doesn't know how to do something like that. Don't you understand? The Gems of Life aren't physical objects--"

And then Kyouko's expression went from a laugh to a look of shock.

"Gone... The Gems of Life... They're all gone! I've been taken in! All of them were taken by that woman--"

And then, Kyouko fell silent. And gave us a bright smile.

In the school hallway, a pale mist appeared. So, had the King of the Night come to save Kyouko?

I began to put distance between us and the mist, trying to make sure that Kyouko didn't get away.

I could hear a voice from the mist.

"I no longer have any use for you."

It was the voice of the King of the Night, clearly mocking his subordinate.

"No way... Why..."

With her hands and feet bound, Kyouko wriggled around on the floor. However, the King of the Night didn't respond.

It seemed that the mist had appeared only so the King of the Night could tell Kyouko that one thing. The mist soon disappeared and the air cleared.

Kyouko bit down on her lip tightly. "That damn woman!" she mumbled angrily.

"Well, it seems you've been abandoned."

"...Ariel-sensei must have negotiated this."

Kyouko was biting down on her lips so hard that I could see blood flowing out.

I see... So everything was Dai-sensei's doing.

Clang clang.

The classroom doors all opened at once. And then the students slowly began to come out.

What the hell?

Weren't they supposed to be in the middle of class?

And... There was something strange about the students who came out.

They swayed from side to side, their arms hanging languidly at their sides. But once they were in the hallway, they were much more lively, beginning to bark like animals.

But the strangest thing of all was that a set of animal ears had sprouted from everyone's head.

It wasn't time for the school festival yet...

END CHAPTER 2

Chapter 3 – You Better Not Forget! Potatoes are Nightshade Plants!



Part 1

Haruna was cowering, but I didn't blame her. What we were seeing was so terrifying that I wanted to cower too.

I hadn't ever seen the students crammed so neatly into the hallway like this... Not even during fire drills. But right now, the narrow hallway was packed with students who had cat ears or bunny ears sprouting from their heads.

What in the world was happening? What kind of event was this?

"I've been done in! Completely! Everything is that damn woman's fault!"

I had no idea what Kyouko looked so angry about.

Considering Kyouko had both her hands and feet bound right now, I lifted her up with my arms. First, we should probably get away from this place.

“This is... one of Dai-sensei’s curses. It may be the most terrifying curse she can use.”

Haruna’s body was shaking as she held onto my clothes. It was different from the way she shook when we faced Megalo. Was she traumatized by animal ears at some point in her past?

“This is Dai-sensei’s spell?”

“Yes... A masou weapon is something that allows a man who can’t use magic, or anybody else, to use high-level magic without a problem.”

Kyouko mumbled out her response.

“So, this is the masou weapon’s power?”

That wasn’t what I expected from people who were victims of a masou weapon...

“Yes. We were fooled. She told us that she would make a weapon that indiscriminately attacked people, and this is the failed weapon that resulted. To think she would do something like this...”

So this wasn’t what they had wanted to happen. As expected from Dai-sensei.

“But this curse is still pretty vicious.”

Still, I didn’t really feel too terrified. The curse was just animal ears, wasn’t it?

“This curse... gradually turns people into animals.”

“Sounds pretty cute.”

“Idiot! Right now it’s just their ears, but eventually they’ll become actual animals, and once that happens there’s no bringing them back! But for now, let’s run, Ayumu! We’ll be infected too if we touch any of them!”

“It’s that bad? How do you fix it?”

“With the parts of human culture that even animals can understand. We have to make them listen to music! We can make them laugh too, but if even one person is left infected, the infection is just going to spread again. So in the end, music is probably the best way.”

What the hell... Well, I didn’t have a choice but to do as she said.

Taking a look around, I saw some of the male students begin to fight. They growled with their arms outstretched and began to attack each other in a way that really fit their animal ears.

I carried Kyouko, and Haruna and I ran to the music room.

Animals instinctively run after things that were running away, so we found ourselves being chased by these students with animal ears.

“Watch it! Aikawa-san! You’re touching my breasts too much!”

Shut up a bit.

“Ayumu, you hentai! Eronbear’s gatekeeper!”⁵⁵

Stop attacking me.

“Dammit! How many people got turned into animals?!”

“I activated the weapon on the first floor. Everyone on the first floor was probably affected.”

“But we were on the second floor.”

“The spell particles get lifted upwards by air currents. Classes on the second floor that had their windows open were probably also infected.”

Virie's spells sounded awfully like biological weapons. The music room was on the fourth floor. I really hoped it hadn't also been contaminated.

We got up to the third floor, and I headed for my own class.

Hiramatsu should be in the wind ensemble. Please, everyone, still be safe.

I opened the door and shouted.

"Is everyone safe?!"

Everyone in the room looked at me with their mouths opened blankly.

"Ah, Aikawa-kun. Please sit down in your seat."

The spectacled, white-haired teacher pointed at my seat with her chalk.

A wave of laughter suddenly broke out.

Why did I feel so embarrassed...?

But, well, it seemed that my own class was still safe.

"Hiramatsu! I need you for a second!"

"Eh? M-me...?"

Perhaps she was alarmed that such an embarrassing person had called her, but Hiramatsu flushed red and seemed on guard.

"If this keeps on, everyone's going to turn into an animal!"

Another wave of laughter rang out at my explanation. I hadn't come to get laughed at.

With Kyouko still held under my arms, I went over to where Hiramatsu was sitting in front of the teaching stand and grabbed her by the arm.

“Just listen, please... Hiramatsu.”

My serious expression made things even worse, and nobody could stop laughing.

“Aikawa-kun, we’re in the middle of class right now...”

I was relieved that this teacher was so soft-spoken. As things were, I didn’t have the time to listen to all the voices around me.

“You know, it’s pretty hot today...”

The boy who sat behind me, who was in charge of curtains, said that and opened the window.

“Idiot! Don’t open that!”

Before Haruna’s warning could reach him, he had already opened the window.

And then...

Bop bop bop bop. Ears sprouted from the students’ heads with a popping noise.

And just like when a corner was taken in Othello, their ears transformed into cat ears from their tips. Afterwards, the cat-eared students attacked the students close by, and the curse spread at a menacing speed.

“Not good! Ayumu, hurry up!”

I took Hiramatsu by the hand and ran out of the classroom.

“Gyaaahhhh!! M-my trademark!!!”

Orito’s scream echoed through the classroom. His spiky head had turned into a pair of giraffe ears.

...That didn’t look bad on him at all.

Perhaps because I was forcefully pulling her by the hand, Hiramatsu fell after her skirt got caught in something.

I tried to grab her by the hand again... but I found myself distracted by the pink flash of her panties. Crap!

“Ayumu!” Perhaps because Haruna was also pulling me by the hand, I never was able to grab Hiramatsu again.

It took all our strength just to get out of the classroom. After Haruna forced the door closed, we could hear the cute cries of various animals coming from the other side.

“Haruna, would whistling work?”

“If you could keep whistling for a few minutes on end, it might be all right...”

“That might be difficult.”

“I’d be able to do it!”

Kyouko chuckled. She was probably trying to get us to let her go, so I just ignored her.

There wasn’t really another choice: we had to head for the music room on the fourth floor. I could only pray that there was no music class today.

When we started walking, the door to the class next door opened.

And what came out was... A cat-eared Tomonori. I could see that her hands had already become paws... Dammit, the symptoms were getting worse.

“Tomonori... You too...”

A bear-like Anderson-kun and a Mihara who had sprouted a tail also emerged into the hallway. Next, from my own class, giraffe Orito, bunny Hiramatsu, and the teacher (who had become a monkey) jumped out.

“We don’t have much time! Hurry, Ayumu!”

God dammit! As if I’d let you all turn into animals! I hurried

towards the music room. I didn't look to the side, I didn't look back; I just dashed with all my heart and soul.

The door to the music room was shut. It was locked, which meant that it wasn't being used.

I felt a tinge of hope.

I forced the door open with my zombie power and escaped inside.

The music room was deserted. There was only a blackboard and a piano, along with a few portraits that were rumored to have moving eyes at night.

Where were the instruments again? In the preparation room next door?

"All right. Haruna!"

"Where's the keyboard harmonica?!"

"The keyboard harmonica!! It's... That's..."

"Ahaha! I can play the piano, you know!"

"Nobody's asking you."

"I'll look in another room!"

It seemed Haruna wasn't able to stand still; she went out of the music room.

"Ukyahh!"

"What's wrong?!"

"Ayumu! Don't open the door! I'm already-"

"Haruna!"

"Ayumu... I'm about to lose my mind... But first, there's something I wanted to say to you."

“Haruna...”

“You better not forget! Potatoes are nightshade plants!”

“Huh? Ahh, okay.” So they were nightshade plants...

It really seemed like it was just something she had wanted to say.

“Also, firefly squids are in the pseudo firefly squid family!”⁵⁶

“Eh? What is that supposed to mean?” What happened to firefly squids?

“Also, the ‘negi’ in ‘negitoro’ doesn’t mean the vegetable... U-unyaaan~.”

Haruna! Please tell me what negitoro means!

“Looks like you’re going to have to negotiate with me, doesn’t it?”

The last thing I wanted was for things to go her way. What should I do? What could I do here?

There was another way. Yes, that’s right: there was one more person I could call on.

I took out my cell phone and dialed out.

“Hello, this is the Aikawa household.”

I had phoned my own home. And Sera had picked up.

Sera could play the violin well, and for better or worse, the violin was back home.

I explained the situation and asked Sera to lend me her strength.

But then...

“I refuse.”

A surprising response came back at me.

What the hell. She was the hero who always showed up with spectacular timing, but now she was telling us that she wouldn't help.

"My comra-... There are conservative faction vampire ninjas at that school."

I see. If she met with other vampire ninjas she might be killed.

"Please."

"I refuse."

"Sera... I can't ask anybody else but you. Please save me... and save Haruna."

"...Excuse me. Please let me think for a bit."

"Sera, please... Sera..."

The phone call cut out.

Dammit... No, she would definitely come. She would definitely...

"It's certainly hot in here. Won't you help me take off some of my clothes?"

"Just deal with it. It's a good time to sweat a bit."

Was she seriously trying to seduce a zombie? After all, her breasts were way too big and didn't match her looks otherwise. For someone who was used to the superior breasts on Sera, this was... *Gulp*. But, my my, breasts sure are nice things... No, bad bad bad! Get a hold of yourself and think! What was a good pair of breasts?! Everyone was getting turned into animals and breasted! I had to breast something before it was too late!

...All right, maybe I should let her take some clothes off. She looked so sad, after all. Yup yup. Breasts breasts breasts.

"More importantly, there are a mountain of things I want to ask you."

“Don’t you think that information shouldn’t be given without something in return?”

“Well, in terms of information I can give you... The masou weapons aren’t actually physical objects, right?”

“Of course not. After all, they do not obey the laws of ‘science’ of this world.”

“But you thought that it was something you could take with you and walk around with, right?”

“Yes. If you don’t contain it in a vessel, wouldn’t it just activate?”

“Vessel... I see, so she was a vessel.”

“She?”

I was a bit hesitant to tell her, but I decided to answer honestly for the sake of the information I wanted.

“Yes, the masou weapon you were looking for before is inside a girl named Tomonori.”

“It was hidden in this world... But you’re saying it was hidden in a human from this world?! And that damn woman told us that *we* shouldn’t do anything inhumane to humans!”

It seemed that the “damn woman” she had been referring to over and over was Dai-sensei.

“So even if you search for it, you won’t find it. It wasn’t being carried by someone, but was placed inside someone... I see. Well then, what does Aikawa-san want to know?”

“I want to know about Dai-sensei.”

“Ah, that. Fine, then. After all, I was completely done in by that damn woman and was utterly defeated.”

“You were completely done in? What do you mean?”

“Ariel-sensei came with us because she wanted to collect my Gems of Life! And then, after she passed me this good-for-nothing weapon, she even stole *him* from me! Agh! It just makes me so annoyed!”

“Wait just a second. Why does she need to do that?”

“All that woman thinks about is overthrowing Virie, so it probably has something to do with that.”

“Wait, wait just a second again. What do you mean ‘overthrowing Virie’?”

“Hm? Haruna is just a small fry, so she probably doesn’t know, but I would have expected Ariel-sensei to speak about this with Aikawa-san.”

“Virie is the name of the world you masou shoujo come from, right?”

“Yes, precisely. Ariel-sensei has been scouting strong humans, making Gems of Life, and producing weapons, all so she can overthrow the current queen. She didn’t want those weapons to be discovered, so she hid them in this world.”

Scouting strong humans... Now that I thought about it, when she first met Sera, Dai-sensei had suddenly tried to recruit her.

And if all these ridiculous weapons were being made in order to beat other masou shoujo, then I couldn’t say I didn’t understand. After all, the masou shoujo were the strongest out of all the species I knew.

“And why do you have the power of a vampire ninja? And why were you working with the King of the Night?”

Kyouko gave me a lonely look that made it clear that this wasn’t a topic she wanted to talk about, but then her expression became calm.

“I had a dog, you know. And that man, he was working at a pet shop. Isn’t that strange? Well, in any case, that was how we met.

My dog's leg wasn't doing well; he was always sick and seemed to be in constant pain."

I really felt that Kyouko looked very sweet when she talked about the past like that. If she hadn't gone down the wrong road, I'm sure she would have ended up as just a normal, cute girl.

"And what do you think that man did to my dog?"

"He desperately tried to nurse him back to health?"

"He killed him."

"Huh? Why?"

-

"Because life is more painful than death."

-

"That's what he said. Of course, I was very angry at him and asked him why he killed something that was trying so hard to stay alive. But that was just my own ego talking. Wanting that dog to live was just the desire of someone else. That dog... He probably didn't want to continue living on like that."

"That can't be. Where in the world is there an animal who wants to die?!"

"Well, you two are quite different people. But there are also people who would prefer the death penalty over life in prison."

"How much of a coward do you have to be to think that death is better than pain?"

"I also don't want to die. Rather, I want to live forever."

"So why would you team up with such a—"

"I wanted to kill that man. But in the end, I couldn't. Aikawa-san, this story applies to you as well."

“Because I’m a zombie?”

“Yuu-san seems to have left you, hasn’t she? And yet you continue to chase after her like you’re a girl, thinking that she also wants to be with you.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“It’s the same story. She went through a few painful experiences and wanted to run away. But you wouldn’t let her. Isn’t this the same selfishness as wanting someone to live even when that person wants to die? In this world, people would call that ‘unwelcome charity,’ would they not?”

I... couldn’t argue back. Kyouko chuckled, seeming satisfied.

“As for the tornado abilities, it was... Yuu-san, I believe? Her immortal blood was also once given to him. So I just had to receive some of that. I guess I just wanted to live too much. That must be why I was thrown away... But, ahh, he sure was cool.”

“Cool? When? I really can’t follow you.”

“He was so childish.”

Kyouko laughed. Dammit, I just heard something disgusting.

“Thank you very much. I feel... a bit better after talking about that.”

I felt a bit conflicted after being suddenly thanked like that.

“..... Even if you give me that look, I won’t let you run away.”

“Aha, don’t worry. I plan to go back to Virie and receive my punishment.”

And that’s when I saw her. There was a single girl on the roof of the building next door.

A single girl with a violin.

It was the first time I had seen such a scene.

Well, that was natural; the only people I knew who went up on roofs are ninjas and Santa Claus, and neither of those had any reason to play a violin.

“Aikawa-san... What do you think you’re doing?!”

I opened the window and heard music.

I didn’t know very much about music, but I could tell at least that this was a classical piece.

Because I had opened the window, I heard a popping noise and my nose became an elephant’s trunk. And once you become an elephant, then you realize it: the long part isn’t the nose, it’s the upper lip.

I wanted to trumpet a roar out into the distance, but the minute that classical music reached my new floppy ears, ears that would put the Seven Deities of Good Fortune to shame, I felt a refreshing feeling blow through me.

Seeming to have noticed me, Sera leapt into the room. Before I realized it, my body had returned to its normal state, free of abnormalities. So the music dispelled the curse this fast... thank God.

“Thank you. I knew I could depend on you.”

“If you ask me using a voice like that... It will give me nightmares.”

The always-prickly Sera readied her violin.

I put my hand on the doorknob to the music room.

“I’m opening it, then.”

“I’m ready any time.”

The minute I opened the door, the crowd of people-turned-animal surged into the room. They were all entranced by the lovely music

coming from Sera's violin and stood still, tears streaming from their eyes.

And, like a deflating balloon, the animal transformations dispelled. Some people had already become more than half animal, but they seemed to still be in the clear.

"Ayumu!"

Haruna bound into the room. It seemed that the people in the hallway could hear the music too.

"The leaf woman came!"

"Yeah, I called her here. Haruna, please take Kyouko to Virie."

"Eh? ...Okay."

Haruna pouted.

"What's wrong?"

"...Nothing... And I worked so hard today, too..."

"Ahh, that's right. Good girl, good girl."

I petted Haruna's head, and she leaned forward and rubbed her head against my moving hand. That girl really reminded me of a cat sometimes.

"Unyaaa~~ N-no, that's not it! Ayumu you idiot!"

Why the hell was she angry?

"Ah, Sera. I'll go with you. If the vampire ninjas try something, then I'll do something about it."

Sera had started off into the hallway and I followed her.

"Ayumu, you morodiot!"

For some reason, I had been insulted with a combination of the words "moron" and "idiot."

Part 2

The next day of school ended with just a school-wide assembly and passing out report cards. And summer vacation would begin from the day after that.

Sera had saved every single person in the school from danger. Though there were a few students who had only narrowly escaped and were shorter as a result.

And after successfully capturing Kyouko, I had begun to regain some of the confidence I had lost to the King of the Night. Even if I had teamed up with Haruna, I had still managed to win without transforming. Wasn't that pretty amazing?

True, Kyouko never transformed into a masou shoujo, and we had fought against her many times before, but she was still a strong opponent. Was it just me, or had I gotten stronger?

Ufufufufu. I'm acting gross, you say? Ufufufu.

If I could just learn magic now, maybe I'd even be able to beat the King of the Night. And then I could welcome Yuu back with pride.

And with Kyouko's information, I now knew where all the fake Megalo were coming from:

They were not being produced in one place, but in dozens of factories in different places. It now made sense why they were everywhere and so hard to pinpoint.

Haruna was in Virie right now, attending a meeting where they were discussing how to destroy the fake Megalo factories.

Swoosh. A green sword hit me on the shoulder.

"Ayumu, why are you just standing there? If you look away in the middle of a battle, you will be killed."

Sera stood in front of me with a sharp glint in her eyes. Once Haruna got back, we were going to go look for the King of the Night and Dai-sensei, so I was learning swordsmanship from Sera while waiting.

“Sorry.”

I held my chainsaw up high.

“Well then, shall we continue?”

Hiken, Tsubamegaeshi: an attack where you make your opponent flinch from a small first cut and make your true attack with the second cut... Gyah!

“Ease up a bit! Why are you cutting me so deep?!”

“I was just suddenly caught up in the moment. Sorry for getting carried away.”

Suddenly... But you’ve been coming at me with full strength for a while now!

“So, what shall I call that skill I used just now?”

“What should you call it? It wasn’t Tsubamegaeshi?”

Hah. She gave me a single ridiculing chuckle. Her laughter was as beautiful as it was irritating.

“Your eyes are so poor that it makes me want to vomit.”

“I see. Well... A cool name would be nice, I think.”

“Hm. A cool name... Exploding Demonic Dragon Divine Kick... Gaeshi.”

“Why is it a kick? Isn’t it a sword technique?!”

“There was a time, long ago, when I also thought there were no kicks in sword techniques.”

Sera looked back to her past with a vague expression of sorrow.

“Why don’t you just call it Fry-gaeshi or something?”⁵⁷

“Hah.” She sighed in exasperation and looked me straight in the eye. “Your unimaginative suggestion makes your lack of vocabulary all the more obvious.”

“Well, what if you just add a cool name to Tsubamegaeshi?”

“For example?”

“Like Ice Break: Tsubamegaeshi.”

“Hmm.” She looked like she liked it!

“Or maybe Heaven and Earth: Tsubamegaeshi.”

“Oh hoh.” She looked really delighted by that!

“Or Divine Assault: Nibelung Tsubamegaeshi!”⁵⁸

“Umm...” Crap! Everything had been ruined!

“I want to slice you in half right now.”

And then she hit me with her true feelings!

“But really, only cutting is a bit plain. Wouldn’t it be better if you shot a laser out too or something?”

“If I shot out a laser, what would be the point of the sword?”

Well, that’s true.

“I guess that in the end, your most lethal weapons are those two plump bouncies you have.”

Zaaaaaaaap!! Electricity ran through my entire body.

“You did... use a laser...”

“That’s just a lightning attack. It’s a form of ninjutsu. It’s not my strong suit, though.”

“If you cut someone with a sword and then use that attack, wouldn’t it be pretty cool?”

“You mean, like this?”

Swish. Zaaaaaaaaap! Gyaaaaaaah!!

Sera quickly circled behind me and slashed my back, and electricity ran through my body.



Just because I'm a zombie... Can't she show me some mercy?!

"Hm. Not bad at all. What should we name it?"

“S-something cool, probably. And we don’t have to get too stuck on working ‘Gaeshi’ into the name.”

“Something cool... Calamity Blade: Darkness Slash.”⁵⁹

“That’s not Grungust, it’s Boing Bust!”

“Ah?” Sera grabbed my cheeks.

...S-sowry.

“There are some pretty common ‘cool’ words, right? Like dragon or God. If you just use words like those, then the name will naturally have a cool ring to it.”

“...I can see where you’re coming from. So, for example?”

If I failed here, then I was going to get slashed and zapped again.

I timidly, timidly muttered:

“Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust... Or something like that?”

“Oh hoh.” Awesome! She looks really happy!

However, in order to perfect that “Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust” technique, in the end I had to get shocked quite a few more times. Well, in return, she taught me a bit on how to handle my chainsaw, so it was give and take.

We had been practicing for around two hours (with a few breaks in between) when Haruna finally returned.

“I’m back. Ayumu, why do you look sunburned?”

“Ah, I was hit by some lightning.”

“What in the world are you two doing right outside the front door? Do you want to get thrown in prison?”

“I wasn’t worried about that at all. So, how was it?”

“It seems that the Virie people can handle the fake Megalo by

themselves.”

“In other words, we shouldn’t butt in. What about Dai-sensei?”

Haruna shook her head.

“Seemed like they couldn’t find her.”

I see. So in the end, once the King of the Night threw Kyouko away, he also changed his base of operations. I would have probably done the same. So now we had to start over from square one... Or, no, if we could get rid of the fake Megalo, then that was a step in the right direction.

“So let’s go look for Dai-sensei again, then.”

“I’ll... stay out of it this time.”

“Why?” But after I asked that, I noticed the expression on Sera’s face.

She still didn’t want to meet the other vampire ninjas. The vampire ninjas were also chasing after the fake Megalo, so there was a high chance we would come across some.

“Haruna, let’s go by ourselves then.”

“Just the two of us? D-d-don’t you go thinking this is a date!”

“Should I call Tomonori too?”

“No! I-I guess there’s no helping it, then... I’ll go with just you.”

“It’s a search. You understand that, right?”

“Hmm, I wonder what I should wear~~.”

She wasn’t listening at all... Well, whatever.

Part 3

I had told her again and again that we were on a search, but I still ended up on the third floor of a department store with Haruna. The third floor of the department store sold nothing but women's clothing, so for a high school male like me, there was no place on earth where I would feel more out of place.

"Hmm, this is excellent craftsmanship."

Haruna inspected a frilly shirt and nodded, speaking like she was on some expert judging panel.

"This one is... quite excellent craftsmanship."

"That's the only thing you've said so far."

"Don't underestimate my vocabulary! I'm looking at each one of these carefully!"

Haruna's face flushed beet red and she grabbed a shirt.

"Umm... I-is this the super shirt of legend?! You bastards!"

You should be praising them there...

"Umm... It sure feels like there's a bargain sale on shirts, doesn't it?"

"Well, it does look like there's a sale going on right now, I guess."

"Ah, this is the thing that what's-her-name was wearing on television."

Haruna picked up a pure white one-piece.

"You are just as terrible with names as ever, aren't you?"

"Wait, wait, it's right on the tip of my tongue. I almost got it."

Haruna pointed to her throat and shut her eyes.

And then she gave me a bright, sparkling smile.

“I remember now! It was Sadako! The girl who sings ‘Coming. I’m definitely coming. I’m definitely coming.’”⁶⁰

“When you say it like that, I actually get a pretty bad impression of it. What else?”

“Nothing.”

“Really?! Nothing?!”

Actually, it seemed I had *overestimated* Haruna’s vocabulary.

“Oh, this embroidery is really cute! But this one over here is also hard to say no to!”

Haruna had taken a t-shirt into her hands but was also looking at the t-shirt right next to her.

Her mouth thinned into a triangular shape; she seemed troubled.

“Ayumu, which one do you like better?”

There was a black shirt with pink writing and a lavender-colored shirt.

From personal experience, whenever a girl asks you, “Which do you like better?” they’ve already made up their mind. So it was pointless for me to pick.

“Umm... Maybe the lavender one?”

“Huh? This one? You sure?”

See? She already knew which one she liked, but she just wanted one little extra push from me.

“Maybe the black one then.”

“Hmmmmmm.....” Still undecided. So she just didn’t want to pick

the one I suggested.

“Let’s go with the lavender one then?”

“Eh? Hm. I’ll get the black one then. Ayumu, buy it for me.”

Geez... Wait, I’m paying for it?! But she was the one who got an actual allowance...

I grumbled in my head all the way to the cash register, but I ended up buying the t-shirt for Haruna.

E-eight thousand yen... I was really depressed, but Haruna just kept piling it on.

“I’m hungry!”

Just what the hell had we come here to do?

“Make something to eat.”

“H-here? Are you an idiot?”

“Well, then let’s go somewhere to eat! Even a dusty old world like this has to have an eatery here or there, right?”

“Uhh, yeah, it does, but-“

“Let’s go then!”

Haruna took my hand and broke out into a run. I had never once managed to stop Haruna once she got like this, so all I could do was sigh.

“You know, I’ve been wondering... How old are you, Haruna?”

“Eh? I’m an eternal seventeen year old.”

“You’re older than me? No way. How old are you really?”

“F... Fourteen.”

What a weird way to lie about her age. Usually when someone said

they were “eternally seventeen,” they were actually older than seventeen, right?

“So you’re as old as you look.”

“Don’t make fun of me! I’m fourteen, but they say I’m a genius who knows just as much as the fifteen-year-olds!”

That didn’t sound like much of a difference. Anyway, Haruna and Yuu looked like they were pretty close in age, but I wondered how old Yuu was. She’d been through a lot, so she might be thousands and hundreds of years old... I wondered what she was doing.

“Ooo...” Haruna’s mouth thinned into a triangle.

“What’s wrong?” I responded in a kind voice. Haruna responded with a karate chop.

“Whenever Ayumu is with me, he’s always thinking about something else.”

“That’s not true at all.”

“That’s definitely true, idiot! Don’t underestimate my radar!”

Haruna’s ahoge spun round and round. All right, I should be careful of her ahoge sensor from now on.

“Hey, Ayumu...”

“Hm?”

“Ayumu... What do you think of the gloomy necromancer?”

What did I think of Yuu? I wondered... A little sister? No, that wasn’t really it...

“She’s family. Or, no... It’s something that’s hard to put into words.”

“And what about the leaf woman? And Yukinori?”

“Yukinori... You mean Tomonori? Well, Sera is a trustworthy

comrade in arms. And Tomonori is a friend.”

“Then everything’s fine!”

“What’s fine? Also, what do you think about Yuu?”

“Hueh? She’s the head of the Leftover Disposal Squad.”

“Really? That’s all you think of her?”

“Don’t make fun of me! It’s an important job! If someone like that didn’t exist, the vengeful spirits of waste would appear!⁶¹ So she’s definitely really importa-... Ayumu! This conversation is over!”

“I see. So it’s pretty normal to think about her during dates.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Hm?”

“Hueh?”

“Not going to react?”

“Ah! This isn’t a date!! This isn’t a date, okay?!”

Haruna waved her hands wildly and I burst out laughing.

After that, Haruna led me around and I helped her shop. Eventually, we began to stroll about to find a place to eat, when I saw something quickly pass by outside.

What was that? Something just-

“A-Ayumu!”

Haruna pointed, and when I followed her finger, I saw Sera.

What? She seemed to be chasing after something... And when I saw the person running ahead of Sera, my eyes widened.

Plate armor and gauntlets. And long, silver hair that fluttered in the wind.

I felt it again... That pain in my chest.

“Yuu!”

“Hueh? Ah-“

Haruna seemed to have noticed Yuu as well.

We rushed out of the department store and followed after Sera.

It was like the time we chased after the King of the Night. We ran out of the department store and through crowded areas. But unlike him, Sera and Yuu headed for areas with fewer and fewer people. By the time they entered a residential district with many mansions lining the street, we finally managed to catch up to them.

“Hellscythe-dono!”

Sera yelled out. She was just within reach of Yuu when a huge animal blocked her way.

It was a polar bear. A slightly rounded polar bear.

“Kuu!” The polar bear didn’t attack. He just stood in front of Sera, blocking her way.

Civilians screamed at the sudden appearance of a polar bear.

Sera swung a leaf sword. The polar bear’s body and his boy’s school uniform turned transparent like smoke, and Sera’s blade passed through his body smoothly like she was cutting through tofu.

“Ufufu.” The polar bear blushed and let out a disgusting noise. It looked like this polar bear got aroused when he was cut.

“This damn perverted polar bear...”

Sera clicked her tongue.

“Not a polar bear! Albino panda!”

If I remember correctly... Albinos had a disease known as albinism, where their skin and hair turned white.

“T-That’s...” Haruna began to shiver. So this was a real Megalo?

“That’s... the class AAA Megalo ‘Federation’s... Ah, White Bear’ Kumacchi! Ah, it’s not Kumacchi... umm...”⁶²

So close! “White devil” would have sounded really cute! Even if he’s AAA class!

“Ah-kuma... baron! It’s an ah-kuma baron!”⁶²

I guess when she didn’t know what to say, she always stopped there. She sure did like those demon barons...

Sera turned towards that “ah-kuma baron”... It’s a bit hard to say, so let’s just go with polar bear from now on. Although, he did really look like a panda.

Sera was being contained by the polar bear. I didn’t go to help her, but chased after Yuu instead.

“Yuu!” At my call, Yuu briefly paid me a single glance.

Yuu wasn’t moving very quickly. I thought I could catch up really quickly, but then a tiger wearing a school uniform appeared in front of me. His fur was completely white. It was a white tiger.

“Albino tiger!”

He himself claimed that he was an albino tiger... But white tigers weren’t albinos.

“Out of the way..”

I glared menacingly at the tiger. Haruna had fallen on her backside and yelled at me.

“Idiot! That’s also a class AAA Megalo, the White Tiger Swan!”

Another confusing name...

Megalo weren’t weak enough for me to beat without transforming. But even so, I couldn’t just stop there.

If I could just punch him away... No, he'll just dodge.

I used 350% strength to kick off the ground and flew to the side. But the white tiger was there waiting for me. I looked towards the place I had jumped from and saw that nobody was there anymore.

What the hell?! When did he move?!

I leapt to the side one more time. But the white tiger was there again.

He was fast. Way faster than even Sera was.

“Albino tiger!”

The white tiger lifted both his arms into the air. Was he about to attack me?

I tried to prepare myself, but instead, the white tiger hugged me.

Almost as if he wanted to dance with me, the tiger clung to me and wouldn't let go. He seemed like he just wanted to keep me in place. Dammit! This was Yuu's doing, wasn't it?!

In the meantime, Yuu had disappeared.

Sera made a pair of wings out of leaves and took to the skies.

The white tiger and polar bears shouldn't be able to fly.

Why hadn't Haruna brought the chainsaw? Was it because she was completely fixated on the date? If I'd just transformed into a masou shoujo, I could have...

I ground my teeth and struggled until the white tiger suddenly released me and ran away together with the polar bear. In other words, there was no longer any need for them to buy time.

That was such a good chance too...

After a few dozen seconds, Sera returned. Her leaf wings disappeared, and she collapsed into me.

“Are you alright?”

“Yes. I just need blood. I used too much of my strength.”

“Were you seriously trying to look for Yuu by yourself?”

“Ahh... Well...”

Geez. If she wanted to look, then we should have done it together.

“Haruna.”

“I got it. I guess I have to.”

Even though she looked in pain, Sera let out a bewitching smile and kissed Haruna.

Part 4

When Sera last saw her, Yuu was going into a mansion.

As we stared up at that eight-story mansion, we heard a thundering roar reverberate through the air. It had come from a corner room on the sixth floor. White smoke silently drifted upwards.

“This is it!”

I started to head through the front door, but I saw the flutter of leafy wings on Sera’s back.

“Ayumu, let’s fly!”

Sera grabbed me and Haruna and flew upwards. A supremely soft mound of flesh pressed into my face, but neither me nor Sera paid that any attention.

Yuu..... Yuu! The vision of that silver-haired girl filled my mind.

When we entered the room from the window, we saw a dreadful sight.

The wall and the floor were burnt black. On the floor were the collapsed forms of a white tiger and a polar-bear-like panda. The two of them were also burnt black, and their school uniforms were in tatters.

And in the corner of the room was Dai-sensei, bound with rope and gagged.

In the middle of the room, Yuu was being lifted by her neck, pulled high enough for her feet to leave the ground.

The one who was holding Yuu’s neck... was the King of the Night.

Well, I guess he did have a normal part-time job, so it wasn’t too strange for him to live in such a normal-feeling mansion.

There was a broken clear table. Plastic bottles and magazines were scattered about. What the hell had happened?

“My precious home has just been ruined, and now an uninvited guest appears... how perplexing.”

The King of the Night gave us a bold smile. Yuu seemed to be in pain, and she was grabbing at the King of the Night's hands.

“Let go of Yuu-“

“Of course I can't do that. If I let her go, she will just run back to the Underworld. Isn't that so?”

When the King of the Night spoke, Yuu just glared at him with sharp eyes.

It looked like words were pointless. Sera held aloft a leaf sword, while Haruna ran towards Dai-sensei.

The King of the Night gave us an irritated look, and dark blue mist filled the room.

He wanted to run away, didn't he? We had to stop him in the next five seconds.

Yuu waved her hands. When she did that, the mist was flicked away. Yuu's gauntlets probably had magic dispelling properties. Nice one.

“Eucliwood, it's not good to do unnecessary things.”

The King of the Night could no longer escape, and Sera pierced him with her sword.

Nice, Sera! Cut off his leg!

“Because of you... Now I have to use this masou weapon to escape.”

Yuu and I were shocked at his words.

Mist appeared, and what was clearly a time bomb materialized.

The King of the Night jumped out the window, still holding Yuu.

“Sera!”

I didn’t even have to say it. Sera had already begun chasing after him.

Yuu reached her hand out towards me. Just wait for me, Yuu... I’ll be right-

“Ayumu!”

I already had a foot on the windowsill when I heard Haruna’s frantic shout.

When I turned around, I saw that Haruna was near tears.

“There is also... a bomb on Dai-sensei... What should I do?”

What should I do... I wasn’t used to hearing those words from Haruna. Bastards.

Thump, thump, thump. My heart felt like it was going to burst out of my chest.

Kyouko’s words ran through my head. My ego was the one chasing Yuu. Yuu didn’t want that.

I closed my eyes and grit my teeth... and then I headed for Dai-sensei.

I removed her gag and started to untie her bindings, when...

“Idiot! Do you want to blow us all up?!”

Haruna got angry at me.

“Ayumu-san. What exactly are you doing~?”

“Sorry. I’ll get rid of the bombs first-“

“That’s not what I mean. Why aren’t you chasing after her?”

“Ayumu is trying to help Dai-sensei.”

Haruna backed me up, but Dai-sensei ignored her.

“My hand is not the hand you should be taking, don’t you think~?”

“Don’t get the wrong idea. It’s not like I’m doing this for you. I just don’t want to leave Haruna behind.”

Dai-sensei laughed.

“That’s something I would expect to hear from Haruna~.”

“Also, Sera is chasing after him already. Anyways, what should I do about this?”

“This... I could disarm it in five minutes.”

“This... I would be able to disarm it in five minutes.”

When I checked the digital clocks attached to the bombs, I saw that they both showed times less than ten minutes.

“That’s cutting it close. Haruna, tell me what to do. I just need to buy a single minute.”

“A-alright! First you need to draw a magic square with magical energy!”

“Sorry... I can’t.”

“Huh? That’s the basics of the basics, you idiot! Die!”

Both of Haruna’s hands glowed ruby and she placed both her hands in Dai-sensei’s hands.

“Dai-sensei, I’m going to borrow some magical energy.”

Haruna looked serious as she began to mumble a spell. I should probably leave her be.

“Alriiiiight~~. Well then, I’ll be the one to tell Ayumu-san what to do~. Please point your hand up~~.”

I did as I was told and pointed my palm to the ceiling.

“Please look at your index finger. There’s a first and a second joint, yeess~~?”

“Yes.”

“So, where’s the next joint~?”

“At the base of the finger.”

“Bzzz! Look at the back of your hand please.”

I turned my hand upside down. Well, certainly, the joint was larger there at the back. So those lines that you often saw used in palm reading were joint lines, were they...?

“So?”

“Ayumu-san is lacking in attention and judgment, so I think disarming this would be impossible for him~.”

“Can’t I try to disarm it just a bit?”

“If you try to touch this with only this world’s knowledge, there’ll be a big *boooooom*~~.”

She was pretty calm in all of this...

“So is this also a masou weapon? It doesn’t look anything like the one that’s attached to Tomonori, though.”

“This is a magical bomb~. I can’t make masou weapons.”

“Huh? So it’s different?”

“Magical bombs are filled with single attack spells~. Masou weapons put large numbers of massacre-level spells in people like Ayumu-san, who have no magical talent.”

“I still don’t really see how that’s different...”

“Magical bombs can only be used once, and they’re fairly powerful.

On the other hand, masou weapons can semi-permanently activate the strongest magical spells~.”

“So, you’re saying that this bomb isn’t very powerful?”

“This bomb is imbued with the strongest explosive spell~. I tried my best to make it~~.”

“I knew it...”

Haruna was the one who said that.

“Dai-sensei, you made a magical bomb before, didn’t you? That wasn’t a failure; you just couldn’t make anything else.”

“Bingoo~~. As expected from Haruna.”

“Wait a sec. There’s something fundamental here that I still don’t understand.”

“What is it~~?”

“So, who exactly made those masou weapons or whatever?”

“It was my friend~. That friend also made the Gems of Life~~. But we pretended that I was the one who made them~~.”

“Why?”

“...Was it because your friend is a man?”

“Bingo once again~~. Haruna is quite a gifted student, isn’t she~?”

“Haruna, what do you mean?”

“In our world... in Virie, females are supreme. Males can’t use magic, and they’re all perverts, and they only make up around twenty percent of the world. Even if someone said that a man had made Gems of Life, nobody would listen to them.”

“But Dai-sensei listened?”

“After all, amazing things are amazing~~. They’re quite

groundbreaking items, you know~? It would be strange to keep something like that hidden.”

“All right, I’m done. The magic shouldn’t activate now.”

“Oh? As expected, Haruna. And there’s... one minute twenty seconds left! Didn’t you say you could do it in five minutes?!”

“Perhaps I tried too hard~~.”

Dai-sensei chuckled.

“You don’t seem worried. You must have some other plan, right?”

“To be honest, I have Gems of Life here. With these, none of us will die~~.”

What the hell. So we were okay from the start? Were those Gems of Life the ones she took from Kyouko?

Geez, even if I didn’t stay here, even if both the bombs went off... Wait just a second.

“How wide is the explosion range of these bombs?”

“It’s the strongest explosive spell, remember~? If I put it in terms of this world’s measurements, then... The range would have a radius of about a kilometer?”

“And could you save all the people living in that range with those Gems of Life?”

“No, no. I said it already, didn’t I~? That none of *us* would die.”

“That’s not good! There has to be some other-“

“Dai-sensei! Cast a levitation spell on me! I’ll take the bomb and fly up to the sky! And then I’ll manage with the Gem of Life and a barrier-“

“That won’t work, will it~? Levitation spells only last up until around 800 meters.”

When Dai-sensei gave that explanation, there was only twenty seconds left on the clock.

“I’ll go. Haruna, I’m leaving you my cell phone and my wallet.”

As I said that, I threw them towards Haruna. Then I gathered strength in my legs as I headed for the window. If I leapt off the wall with 600% strength, I was sure I could clear 200 meters.

“Ayumu-san’s body is immortal, isn’t it? Are you sure it’s still okay if you’re blown to dust~?”

“There’s no time to... worry about that.”

“I see. Well then, please fly with all your strength. I’ll also pass you a Gem of Life just in case~.”

“Ahh... See ya then... Haruna.”

Haruna gave me no response. Her ahoge just jumped back and forth anxiously.

Dai-sensei inserted a blue light the size of my pinky into my chest. I didn’t feel anything.

I took the bomb and leapt out the window.

At the point when I was around 200 meters in the air, I felt a sudden gust of wind blow up from beneath me, wrap me up, and fling me even higher. Soon, I felt almost as if my throat and lungs were about to be crushed...

And then my world went white.

END CHAPTER 3

Chapter 4 – I... Like Penguins.



Part 1

When I came to, I had been blown to powder.

...Where was I? In a river? It felt like I was in water.

I had been so splendidly reduced to shreds that I wasn't even sure if I had any brain matter left.

In the past, when my arm flew off, I would have to go and retrieve it, but what should I do when I was completely blown to pieces?

With things like this, I had no choice but to pick things up one by one. I guess zombies really didn't die even if they were blown up... So was this the beginning of my journey to find my scattered body parts?

Don't be ridiculous. That journey would take longer than the adventure to collect the pieces of the Shikon Jewel.⁶³

A warm blue light shone on me. What was this peaceful-feeling light? Ever since I had become a zombie, I had developed a prejudice against light, but sometimes light felt good...

As I wondered what was going on, I suddenly felt the sensation of something attaching. Ahh, it was the feeling I got when my cut-off body parts reattached themselves.

So that blue light... was gathering up all my body parts? That's what it felt like at least.

Oh, I see. Was that the power of the Gem of Life?

I felt a sense of relief... and then I lost consciousness again.

Part 2

The next time I came to, I felt a surge of pain and quickly kicked myself upwards.

I had hands. I had legs. I was completely naked and underwater.

I almost felt like I was the Terminator, but I definitely had a heart, so I felt incredibly embarrassed.

Give me air! Please, everyone! Just give me a little air!

But the water was unexpectedly shallow. My head soon broke through the water's surface.

There was no moon in the sky. Rather, the sky was so polluted that we might not have been able to even see the moon.

It was pitch black, but for a zombie like me, this wasn't that much different from daytime.

I looked around me while I floated on top of the water. I realized that wherever I was, it was surrounded by a fence.

Was this... a pool? It was a school pool, wasn't it? I sure fell in an out-of-the-way place.

I had no idea what school this was, but the first step was to climb out of the pool.

I felt a bit swollen all over, but there weren't any obvious wounds on my body.

I leapt over the fence and headed for the school gate while looking around me.

Because the school building had a clock on it, I found out that it was currently three in the morning.

There was a naked guy wandering around a school pool at three in the morning. Anybody would have immediately thought I was a pervert.

But, most importantly, I had to figure out where I was.

From the name of the school, I realized that I had been blown about two train stations away...

Geez. It was at times like this that I really wished I was a ninja.

Well, then... Time for a run?

Part 3

Hah... Hah... How do you like my zombie strength? I just ran two stations in three minutes!

Maybe I should go to the Olympics or something! Well... If they have a night Olympics, that is.

Ugh, I'm beat. Considering I was naked, that was definitely a nerve-wracking marathon.

I went to open the front door. I went to open the... Gnnnnnggg... Huh? It's locked? Why?

I rang the doorbell once, but I couldn't hear anything from inside the house.

I walked a bit around the house.

Were Haruna and Sera not there...? I tried to peek into the living room but my view was blocked by the curtains.

Ah, there was a light on in the bathroom. When I looked in, I saw a familiar ahoge.

Oh. She was in the bathroom.

"Hey, Haruna. Unlock the front door."

I spoke softly so I wouldn't wake the neighbors. Haruna turned in my direction, and...

"Ugyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhh!!!!!"

Her scream hit my zombie eardrums straight on. It was a scream that would have put the ones you heard in horror movies to shame.

"It's a pervert!! A pervert is here!!!"

Be quiet! Haruna, be quiet! Stop screaming like you saw Bigfoot⁶⁴ or something!

“Haruna, it’s me. Calm down!”

“You really think I can calm down?!”

Haruna flushed, trying to drown out the sounds of trickling water.

“Just go away!”

“I’ll wait for you... by the entrance.”

“You a high school girl after her graduation ceremony or something?!”

I went around to the entrance and gripped the doorknob, waiting for the door to unlock. As soon as I heard a *click*, I opened the door and moved into the house with more agility than a cheetah.

“I’m back, Haruna.”

I opened my arms and gave her a fresh smile.

“Don’t open your arms! Hide yourself! Why the hell do you look like that?! Even using the Kaiouken amplified by twenty wouldn’t make you that naked!”⁶⁵

Haruna averted her gaze and took something from the umbrella stand.

I felt goosebumps run across my entire body.

Yes! If I remembered correctly... the things stuck in that umbrella stand were...

The two katana that Dai-sensei used as her masou renki!

Haruna held the two swords up on both sides like an Estark from Dragon Quest.

But as powerful I had become, I could just brush her attack away.

Fufufu. How naïve, Haruna... You can't beat- gyaaaah!! She completely pierced me through!

"Ayumu's movements are easy to read. Don't think you can evade my attacks that easily."

What?! Well, she did manage to learn how to read Kyouko perfectly. And since we'd lived together all that time, she probably could read me like a book.

"Well then, Haruna. Do you know what I'm going to do now?"

I opened both my arms and slightly gripped my hands into fists. Haruna was probably trying to guess whether I was going to come from the left or the right. Kukuku. I was only pretending to do that, but I would show her: I'd push her down by the waist instead.

"You're pretending you're going to punch me, but you're really thinking about doing something perverted."

.....Correct.

".....Sorry."

"Just hurry up and go change already."

".....Sorry."

I covered my private parts and went up the stairs, my shoulders slumped.

"Also..."

I heard Haruna speak softly, so I turned around. "What is it?"

".....Welcome back."

That's how I realized that there was an incredibly cute girl standing in front of me.

Part 4

After I changed and headed back to the living room, I saw the forms of Haruna, Sera... and Dai-sensei.

Ah, was everyone waiting for me?

“I’m happy to see the Gem of Life did it’s job properly~~.”

Dai-sensei had tied her hair into twin-tails and was smiling at me, her hands pressed together in front of her.

“I’m relieved too. What happened to Yuu?”

I glanced at Sera to gauge her mood.

“I apologize. They disappeared into the mist.”

That ability was as annoying as ever.

“Dai-sensei, are you feeling all right? You were locked up all this time, right?”

“Hmmm, well, I had to wear the same pair of underwear that entire time so I really just wanted to die, buuuut, other than that everything was perfectly pleasant~~.”

“So, do you know where that man is now?”

“I wonder~. Even if I knew, I don’t believe Ayumu-san would be able to beat him~~.”

“Would Dai-sensei be able to win?”

“Yes. If I just had my masou renki, escaping from there would have been simple as well.”

“Simple,” she said... Well, she was able to hold her ground against both Kyouko and the King of the Night at the same time, so she

probably would be able to beat him one on one, but...

“I’m going to be the one who beats him.”

When she saw the fierce look in my eyes, Dai-sensei seemed amused and chuckled.

But it was true. If I wasn’t strong enough to beat him, Yuu would never trust that I would be able to protect her.

“Fufu, I see. I thought you would say that~~. Well then, Ayumu-san. I’m sorry to say thiiiis~~, but I actually made fourteen of those magical bombs~.”

“Duds?”

“No, no, ones with explosive spells included~.”

“That’s quite a few. So he used two... and there’s twelve left...”

“Yes. And if you can’t find thooose~~, then even if you track him down it will turn out badly for you~~.”

“So we just have to find those first.”

“Well~~, I’ve already called together some masou shoujo to take care of that~.”

“I’ve... also reported this to the vampire ninjas.”

Sera seemed a bit tired.

“All right, then we can also-“

“Well, about that, Ayumu-san~~. I was thinking that I would train Ayumu-san while all the bombs are being found~.”

“By Dai-sensei herself! That’s amazing, Ayumu!”

Haruna’s eyes were sparkling. Her ahoge was also bouncing around like there was no tomorrow.

“That would be a huge help. All right, I’ll get ready right away-“

“Don’t you want to rest a bit? I may look like this, but I’m quite strict, you know~~.”

“I already soaked in the tub for ten minutes. Let’s head to the graveyard, then.”

“I’ll go too-“

Haruna began to stand up, but I raised a hand and stopped her.

“Haruna, please prepare dinner. I really want to eat your cooking.”

And I also wanted to talk with Dai-sensei alone.

Part 5

It was five in the morning. I knew that nobody would be visiting the graveyard. I didn't know how lazy the groundskeeper here was, but I never saw anybody here. I wondered if this place got much more lively during Obon or something...

There was a girl in front of me, clad in a white coat.

"Well then, Ayumu-san. You have something you would like to ask me, don't you? You tried hard to keep Haruna from coming with us, so I know that you must want to know what I'm planning, yes~~?"

"There are a few things I want to ask: why are you making masou weapons, why did you put one in Tomonori, and what do you plan to use that weapon for?"

"For the first question, my friend is the one making the weapons, not me. For the second question, it's because it was a way for me to save that girl from her wounds. And for the third question..."

Dai-sensei thought for a bit and looked me straight in the eyes.

"I plan to use the weapons to overthrow Virie~~."

She spoke that in a surprisingly easygoing tone.

"Why?"

"I... don't want to be at war anymore."

"I understand that, but... Isn't it pointless if you start a war to achieve that?"

"I worked really hard to plan it out so we could end everything with one war, you know~~? Virie has been at war with the world called the 'Underworld' for a loooong time~~. And from the start, Virie has prospered by absorbing the other worlds that exist. This

world is no exception to that.”

“So they’re invaders? Why do they need to do something like that?”

“It gives their life meaning. For example, say Ayumu-san obtains the most powerful sword in the world. Wouldn’t he want to try it out? But there is no longer anybody in this world that can match him. So he goes to other worlds to test his strength.”

“Well, I guess that’s true.”

“And when you go to the other world, you once again obtain a new power. Wouldn’t you want to use it? Virie continues to wage war for that reason. All I want to do is to stop those wars.”

“In other words, the Megalo aren’t attacking you, but the masou shoujo are attacking the Megalo?”

“Well, Virie attacked the Underworld, and so the Megalo began to attack the masou shoujo.”

Ugh. No matter how you looked at it, Virie was the bad guy here.

“I understand now. I want to help you. So, who is that amazing friend of yours?”

“My childhood friend. He is just an amazing craftsman. Hasn’t Haruna mentioned him to Ayumu-san? She calls him a demon baron.”

T-the demon baron actually exists?! I thought about it, and... Haruna certainly mentioned something back when she was helping me study for my test. Dammit, I can’t remember what she said...

Hmm... Was it that there was some kind of civil war in Virie?

“Wait just a second. Does that mean Tomonori is this demon baron’s daughter?”

“Not his daughter. She’s... something like a daughter. When he was here, in this world, she became quite attached to him.”

So the demon baron once came to this world? If I wanted to know more, I probably would have to ask him myself.

“Well, shall we start~~? His speed is nothing special. So let’s start by getting you used to it~~.”

And like that, my training started. It seemed that Dai-sensei wanted to avoid talking about the demon baron.

“So, please evade all of these~~.”

Dai-sensei gave me a smile and quickly rushed up to me.

And then she kicked me in the jaw.

“Wha-?! We’re already starting?”

“I won’t stoop~~. You have to evade ten attacks in a row~~.”

Dai-sensei began to punch me almost as if she was attacking a sandbag. Evading ten attacks in a row... I couldn’t even evade one. How the hell was she moving like that? It wasn’t boxing, and it wasn’t Chinese martial arts...

What’s more... Each and every attack was made with enough force to make me faint in agony.

“Come on, go a bit easy-“

“This is how strong that man is~~. It would be pointless for me to go easy.”

She sent a liver blow into my gut all while grabbing my clothes and adding in a knee strike.

God dammit. I was gonna do this! I sent an attack back at Dai-sensei.

“Precisely. It’s important to limit your opponents motions by adding in attacks of your own.”

She patted my head. Hey, hey, I’m in the middle of an attack!

I was going for it. Ten attacks evaded in a row!

We repeated the same motions over and over and over again, and when I had finally begun to figure out Dai-sensei's movements, the sun was already high in the sky and we had to suspend our training.

In the end, I had only managed to evade two attacks in a row. I had gotten used to Dai-sensei's speed, but I just couldn't keep up with it.

When I went back home, I showered the sweat from my body and had my fill of Haruna's superb cooking in the living room.

Perhaps she was happy that she could be with Dai-sensei, but Haruna had a huge smile on her face.

"Ayumu." Sera called my name. For some reason, she was grimacing.

"Will you... go somewhere with me?"

Was that the first time Sera had asked me to go out with her? It made me kind of happy.

"Do you also want a date with me or something?"

"This damn lowlife... No, no, that's not it."

D-did she just call me a damn lowlife? I-I really couldn't hear her too well. Hah hah hah...

Sera glanced at Haruna. Haruna was all smiles while she chatted with Dai-sensei. Her ahoge was waving around like a dog's tail.

I see. Sera... You wanted to leave Haruna and Dai-sensei alone for a while, right?

"I got it."

"But for a date... Fine. We'll do it on February 30th."

"Really? If you're okay with it, then that makes me happy..."

Wait, February 30th? That was never going to come! Are you saying

I can only have one date with you ever four years?!

All the water in my body turned into tears.

Part 6

I felt like we were a couple as we walked along side by side, and I was filled with happiness. Anyone would agree that Sera was beautiful, so walking beside her like that must have made me look like a nobody tagalong.

Were we going to shop in the usual department store? Or maybe we would shop in the nearby supermarket...

I was pretty conscious of the staring people we passed by as we strolled around.

“So, where shall we go?”

Saying it like that made it sound like we were dating too.

“Why are you speaking in such a disgusting way like that?”

“Eh? I’m speaking like I always do...”

“It’s really disgusting, so please stop.”

“...I’m sorry. So?”

“There’s a place I’ve always wanted to go-“

“Let’s go there, then.”

“No, actually, it’s fine, really.”

“Hey, hey, you don’t have to hold back. After all, this is the first time I’ve been out with you alone.”

“That’s... true. Well, let’s go there, then.”

Sera didn’t tell me where we were headed as she simply continued to walk.

I just followed her. We boarded a train and advanced along the same road I had taken to go to the planetarium. We passed a bowling alley and an arcade. It had only been about a month, but I felt a twinge of nostalgia attack me.

When we arrived in a more crowded area, Sera suddenly began to speed up. I hurried, trying to catch up with her, when...

"I apologize, but I don't want to be seen walking with you alone. Please stay behind me and to the side."

"A-ahh... sorry. We're not dating, after all."

I was completely disheartened, so I satisfied myself by looking at Sera's swishing ponytail and soft butt as she walked in front of me... Well, I thought, this isn't bad either.

"How much longer do you think it's going to be?"

It was an incredibly natural question to hear from someone who didn't know where he was going.

"I am really sincerely sorry, but..."

Sera didn't turn to look at me, simply letting out a sigh. Was it seriously that far away...?

"Please don't stay within earshot of me."

Kwah! That was way too harsh! Did she hate me that much?!

".....I'm sorry. I see."

I tried to keep myself from crying as we walked for a few minutes, until Sera called out to me from up ahead.

"I accidentally found this place when I was tailing Ayumu and Mael Strom..."

Just hearing her say that made me absurdly happy.

"Oh? What is it? Are we here?"

The place Sera had stopped in front of... was a maid café.

A-a-a maid café?! Why was Sera coming to a place like this?!

We walked inside and were greeted by a pretty cute girl.

“Welcome back, my masters! Shall I prepare a table for two?”

She gave us the soft, innocent, sparkling smile of a girl who couldn't even hurt a fly.

Sera, meanwhile, had a look in her eyes that said she wanted to kill that fly right away, and she held up one finger.

“No, table for just one.”

“Wait! Wait a second! It's for two! It's for two, dammit! It should be for two!”

I desperately corrected her.

We went to one of the tables quite inside the shop and I sat across from Sera. I looked at the menu and shook my head in resignation. It was pretty expensive. Well, this kind of place was more for the pretty girls than the food, so this price was probably pretty appropriate.

“What are you smiling like that for? You're disgusting.”

“Ah, I was just thinking that it's a bit funny to see you wanting to come to a place like this.”

“Just seeing cute outfits like this is enough to leave me satisfied.”

Sera's expression was as piercing as ever, but her cheeks flushed just slightly red as she gazed at the café employees.

“Now that you mention it, you're always wearing trendy outfits, aren't you? Even though you're a ninja.”

“That's just it!” Sera suddenly sounded a bit worked up. I was surprised.

“The vampire ninja outfits are all just too plain! We wore chainmail back in the village, you know? We didn’t even have bras on!”

Well, that’s great, isn’t it? But I didn’t have any time to get that comment in.

“And those mantles... If we don’t wear it, our powers are limited, so...”

Like a dam had just broken, Sera began to grumble on and on about the vampire ninja outfits.

“So, do you want to try on a maid uniform?”

“No. That’s disgusting.”

“So what in the world do you want to do, then?”

“The clothes are cute. However, I do not want to wear them. Isn’t that why we came all the way out here, to this shop?”

Sera sighed in exasperation at me.

“But listen to this: at the vampire ninja training institution, they don’t even let you wear skirts...”

I just listened and responded when necessary. I resolved to listen to each and every one of Sera’s complaints, and I would start by trying to sympathize with her.

The complaints just streamed out one by one. When she seemed to have finished and was taking a breath, I butt in.

“Hey, Sera. Do you think... that Yuu wants to be with us?”

“Yes, of course she does.”

It was an instant, unhesitating answer. Her piercing eyes felt like they were seeing right through my cowardly heart.

“But maybe that’s just what we think, and Yuu actually thinks we’re a bother-“

“Of course she doesn’t think that.”

“How can you be so sure? Didn’t you also think that Yuu went back to the Underworld because we did something wrong?”

“Why do you think I was able to find Hellscythe-dono?”

“Now that you mention it, how exactly did you find her?”

“She was watching. She was watching Ayumu’s... our home. In the end... she couldn’t just throw it all away. She made up her mind, but, just as I couldn’t throw away the vampire ninjas, her feelings of attachment have lingered.”

Our home, she said... As I heard that, I felt something welling up in my chest once again. But it wasn’t the same unpleasant feeling I had felt before; this time, it felt comforting.

“Oh... So Yuu does feel like I do. But you, weren’t you a bit too eager back there? If Yuu was near our house, then you could have let Haruna and me know.”

I laughed, but Sera glared at me with her jade-colored eyes.

“Unlike you, I was actually chasing after Hellscythe-dono seriously.”

“I don’t think I can let that comment pass.”

“Then, why exactly... Why didn’t you chase after Hellscythe-dono?”

She was talking about the time the King of the Night ran off with her, wasn’t she?

Hidden under long eyelashes, her slitted eyes pierced me through with their pressure.

Was that why she had been so hateful to me these past few hours?

“Are you... angry at me?”

“Of course. You... abandoned Hellscythe-dono, did you not? I find

that honestly worthy of scorn.”

Well, she found everything I did worthy of scorn.

“...I was trying to save Haruna and Dai-sensei. So what? Are you saying I should have saved Yuu even if it meant they died? Plus, when Yuu was taken away, there was a very small chance she would actually get killed.”

“Those all just sound like excuses. Ayumu really looked completely lost.”

Sera’s voice hurt my ears. Something was itching in my chest. When I thought about Yuu...

“Ahh... To be honest... I was feeling pretty lost.”

“You’ll never get Hellsythe-dono back if you continue acting that way.”

“That’s probably true.”

“It is true. Sometimes being as forceful as Haruna is necessary. If it means I can take Hellsythe-dono by the hand, then... I will definitely follow her example.”

“To go to Haruna’s level... Well, if Yuu really wants to be with us... But, still...”

“See? You’re hesitating again. When you’re like that, you’re much more annoying than Haruna is.”

“So you really think Haruna is annoying, don’t you?”

“It’s better than being disgusting... like you are.”

Sera didn’t show any hint of hesitation as she smiled. But her smile was aimed at a girl in a maid outfit whose panties were almost showing. It seemed that that maid girl was more important than our conversation was.

Geez... So sometimes you had to be like Haruna, huh...?

Part 7

My training went more smoothly the second time.

If that was true, did that mean that I was steadily getting stronger?

Dai-sensei still didn't seem to be trying, and someone like me was still no match for her, but that didn't mean I couldn't see her movements.

"Now, now, today, how about Ayumu-san transforms and tries his very, very best~~?"

"Transform, huh...?"

I was a bit at a loss. We hadn't really met any Megalo lately, so I had managed to deal with things without transforming, but now I had to change into that outfit again?

"We can just pretend I trans-"

"No, no, that won't do. That just won't dooo~~."

It looked like I was out of options. I gripped my chainsaw and began my chant.

"Nomobuyo, woshi, hashitawa, dokeda, gunmiicha, dei, ribura."

My clothes popped off and the masou shoujo costume appeared on my body instead.

"Well, then... Today we will practice attacking."

I had been waiting for this. In the end, attacking was much more my style than defending.

"Is Dai-sensei not going to transform?"

"Are you suuuure~~? You won't be able to lay a single finger on

me then. Is that fine~~?”

Well, that’s true. After all, a transformed me was just about at the level of an untransformed Dai-sensei.

“That man usually stands pretty still and doesn’t try to evade. But if you transform into a masou shoujo, I think the story will be different~~. But if you don’t transform, you wouldn’t ever be able to beat him~~.”

“So... How should I go about attacking him, then?”

“Quite simple. Don’t think about anything and go at him with alllll your strength~~.”

“You think I can hit him that way?”

“No, no, probably not. But if you keep going and going and going~~, eventually you’ll find a chance. And then all you have to do is seize that chance~~.”

I did what she said, beginning to attack Dai-sensei. Dodge, dodge, dodge... But even then, I continued to attack.

And then I saw Dai-sensei raise her fist.

Now! This was it! I slashed my chainsaw down.

Crap. I accidentally put all my strength into that attack. Not good... I was going to kill her... Or not. She dodged the attack, so I only managed to cut off a bit of one of her twin tails.

She got behind me, moving faster than I had seen her move before, and pushed me from behind.

“Correct. How wonderful~~.”

She clapped for me, but I didn’t know it was really something be happy about.

“Well thennnn, time for me to be serious too~~.”

Hm? Was she mad? Could it be because I cut off a bit of her twin tails?

Wait... Seriously... Uwah!

Once my masou shoujo outfit had been beaten full of holes, our training session ended.

She was way too strong... As expected from Dai-esnsei. In the end, I'd grazed her twin tails, but I hadn't managed to touch her again.

"Shall we end our training for today~? Now then, about Ayumu-san's performance..."

"Can I beat him?"

"Not at allllll~. It's not even a question. Your chances of winning would be aroooound... ten percent."

"Ten percent is plenty."

"It's not~. We haven't even taken his abilities into account, so the wise move is to not challenge him at all, I think~."

"Even then... I'm gonna beat him."

"If enough of that mist is around that man, Ayumu-san's chances of winning drop to zero~."

"Because he can run away?"

"No no no. That mist can teleport matter from one place to another. In other words, if he surrounds himself with the mist, no attack you can make would go through~."

"So what should I do?"

"I don't know~. I could blow the mist away with wind, but wind magic is pretty difficult~."

Right.

So, first, we had to think of a countermeasure. Against that

teleportation mist.

Part 8

The next night, suddenly, the time of truth arrived without warning.

I had just finished my magic training and my special training session with Dai-sensei, and I was still in the middle of changing. So when Sera burst into my room, I hid my chest with my shirt and let out a squeal.

“Kyaaahh! Sera-san is such a perv.”

“Please stop behaving so strangely. It’s disgusting.”

She really couldn’t take a joke. Seriously, stop glaring at me like that.

“What did you want?”

“A large number of demons have appeared.”

So the fake Megalo again? Wait... Hadn’t they destroyed all the sources of those things?

Don’t tell me... Was the King of the Night making his move?

“According to Tomonori, almost a thousand demons have suddenly appeared.”

Why so suddenly? And so many... But we didn’t have time to think about this.

“Let’s go!”

“Those were exactly the words I came here to hear.”

“That’s strange. I thought you didn’t want to go any place where vampire ninjas were...”

“Well, these circumstances are a bit special...”

When we exited my room, I saw Haruna sitting there.

“A-Ayumu...”

Haruna’s legs were shaking.

“T-take me to the bathroom.”

Haruna was lying flat against the floor, so I picked her up and headed for the bathroom.

“Do you feel Megalo around?”

“Yeah. This feels really bad.”

Haruna was afraid... So these Megalo were the real thing? What the hell? As I carried Haruna to the bathroom, Dai-sensei came out from the living room.

“Oh my, it seems that the real Megalo have managed to track that man down~~?”

So as I thought: real Megalo had came from the Underworld.

“Dai-sensei should also come with-“

“I’m returning to Virie for a moment. This is a good opportunity to defeat the Megalo, after all~~.”

Right, she was going to call the other masou shoujo. We quickly began to move.

“Ugh...” Haruna groaned as she appeared from the bathroom.

“Are you all right? You can stay here if you want, you know?”

“Huh? What are you saying? Of course I’m going!”

I thought she would say that. As it was, there was no way to know what was happening without going to check.

Part 9

We boarded a train and headed for the city center.

It seemed that the Megalo appeared right around the time the last magical bomb was recovered.

We got off the train and ran. It took about five minutes to finally reach a lively area that seemed like the place we were looking for.

It was like a festival, or something festival-like; the streets were just flooded with Megalo. They weren't really doing anything special, though, just standing there in a daze.

The crowd must have thought that there was a film shoot going on or something, because the normal people just watched with smiles on their faces.

Well, all the Megalo had those school uniforms on, so I didn't blame them for thinking that way.

If someone told me that the Megalo were just students on a field trip who got carried away, I honestly might have believed that.

We stood far away and just stared at that strange sight. Another group of people was doing the same thing.

Tomonori was with them. It seemed that the vampire ninjas had also rushed over, but they hadn't tried to act. They were probably imagining the chaos if they tried to take on this many Megalo at once. It was a natural decision to just watch the situation until they could figure out what those Megalo were thinking.

Sera stood somewhere she wouldn't be seen by the other vampire ninjas.

Geez, what the hell were those Megalo thinking?

When I looked up at the sky, I could see something sparkle. It was headed our way.

A meteor shower was headed straight for us, crossing over Tokyo Tower.

Was that the masou shoujo? It looked like they were coming here with all they had.

The masou shoujo fell down to earth like meteors. As expected, the normal people began to run around, trying to escape.

The first person to land was Dai-sensei. After that, other girls in cute costumes touched down.

“I-I’m going too!”

Once she saw all the other masou shoujo, Haruna seemed unable to hold it in any longer and began to run towards them. It took all she had to keep standing before that, but she could change her mood pretty quickly in the right situation.

“Haruna, please wait!”

Sera tried to stop her, but when Haruna got like that, she was almost impossible to stop.

Geez... Maybe I should go stop Haruna...

...Wait just a second. Where was the King of the Night?

I looked towards the sky again. In that direction was... Tokyo Tower.

I see. I wondered why I didn’t get it before.

He was watching it all, wasn’t he? And what’s more, he was doing it from up above, like always.

That viewing platform... If he was up there, he would probably be able to see all the fuss down below, right?

I looked at Sera and Haruna, who were looking elsewhere, and then I broke out into a run without calling out to them.

The vampire ninjas, the masou shoujo, Dai-sensei, Sera, and Tomonori were all back there. I could just leave it to them. Plus... If I told them that the King of the Night was up there and I was wrong, that would be pretty embarrassing.

Part 10

Viewing platform, first floor. Viewing platform, second floor. I couldn't see anybody like the King of the Night. Maybe my instincts had been wrong?

But when I reached the special viewing platform, I found a silver-haired girl there. No one else. There was only a single, small girl. It was Yuu, surrounded by slanting anti-glare glass; she stood in a daze next to the lit-up floor, eyes turned towards the window.

“So you came.”

When I heard a voice from behind me, I immediately opened my traveler's bag and grabbed my chainsaw.

“You know, I didn't actually think I would find you here.”

I gripped my chainsaw and glared at him.

“Feast your eyes on this. It's finally time.”

“You going to use a weapon?”

“No, the weapons have already been confiscated. Look, that's the last one over there.”

He pointed somewhere, but all I could see down there were buildings.

“So what happens no-“

Boom. My head turned toward the sound of an explosion.

It was a weapon... No, it wasn't. That explosion was too small. But I could definitely see flames.

Tokyo was burning.

“Faster than I expected. The masou shoujo are as hotheaded as always.”

“What do you mean? What are you trying to say?”

“The war has begun. The Megalo, the masou shoujo, the guardians of this world... Each side is strong in its own way. You could say that we have three men here, all holding each other at gunpoint. And what do you think will happen once someone opens fire?”

Something... like this mess.

“By the way, Eucliwood was the one who called the Megalo. I made her do it.”

“Why would you do something like-“

“Just take a look.”

With a gentlemanly motion, the King of the Night pointed his palm towards Yuu.

Yuu was crying. The throbbing in my chest pushed my unhappiness meter to the max.

“Look at that face. I wanted to see that sorrow on her face. What do you think? Beautiful, isn’t it?”

Yuu looked scared, and her face was filled with sorrow. The King of the Night must have thought that was more beautiful than anything else. He looked like he was just a moment away from bursting into song.

“This world is beautiful, so beautiful that cannot be described by mere words... That’s what Eucliwood has always said.”

The King of the Night spread his arms with an expression of ecstasy on his face.

“And now that world is burning! All because of the ‘war’ you hate so much! Come, Eucliwood! Kill me! Are you not pained?! Are you not sorrowful?! Do you not hate me?!”

But Yuu just absentmindedly stared down at the black smoke that billowed up from the city.

“Still not enough? Well, that’s fine. This city will now fall to ruin. And then even you will want to kill me.”

“What the hell are you saying... What the hell are you saying?! Are you doing all this just so you can get killed by Yuu?”

“You will someday understand. To die is painful, but it’s still better to die than live.”

The King of the Night stroked Yuu’s white chin with a sad look on his face. Yuu just looked back at him with her emotionless blue eyes.

“Listen. When I received this immortality, I rejoiced; I thought that I could do anything in the world. But soon the world around me grew stale. I realized then how sad it was to be able to do anything in the world.”

And that’s why he wanted Yuu to kill him? Well, I guess Yuu was the only person who could kill zombies.

I cannot.

“You still don’t hate me enough? Just take a look.”

The King of the Night pointed outside. Flames rose from a place different from the one before... No, flames were everywhere.

“There are still some of my Megalo left. This city still has a ways to burn.”

I hate you. So much that I want to kill you.

“Yes! Exactly!”

The King of the Night sounded very happy.

But I cannot. I do not want to kill friends anymore.

"I... see. Just like usual. So your scythe will hurt me, and yet you will not kill me. What a hypocrite. Well then, until you change your mind, I'll just stay here and enjoy your anguish."

The King of the Night turned towards me. I was enraged.

"For such an absurd reason--"

"Someday, you will also come to know the sadness of living forever. At that time, you will also begin to hate Eucliwood."

Yeah, right. We were different.

And I didn't mean our strengths were different. It was a difference in how much we cared about Yuu.

Yuu was cute when she cowered. She was cute when she looked sad. That we agreed on.

But I would never actually wish her to feel that way.

-

"Have you never seen Yuu's smile?! That's when she's the cutest!"

-

I held my chainsaw up. It was time to show off everything I had learned from Dai-sensei.

The King of the Night was probably readying himself for an attack from up high.

And then, I... threw my chainsaw at him!

As I ran, I gathered strength in my right arm. I would hit him while he was distracted!

200%... 300%... Eat this! Get blown away! Cry out in agony!

My fist caught the smiling King of the Night in the face. He didn't try to dodge.

So even if I charged him, he wouldn't move at all. It was just as I had expected. I would use this; I'd punch him over and ov-

"Gah!" A stream of saliva flew out of my mouth as my body was lifted straight upwards.

The King of the Night stood in front of me, shaking his fist. To think that he could hit me with an uppercut so easily... He was much faster than I had thought.

A shadow covered my face. A fist-shaped shadow. Before I could do anything, that fist hit me cleanly right in my forehead.

I spun through the air like a badminton shuttlecock, and I couldn't brace myself before the back of my head scraped along the floor.

I couldn't do anything at all. Less than a second after I had punched him, I was already down. The force of his punch... was around my 100%.

"Eucliwood, you just reacted, didn't you?"

The King of the Night laughed gleefully.

"Your expression just now was quite sublime. It seems that if I hurt this person, Eucliwood becomes sadder."

"I'm going to pulverize you."

414... 506... I'll show you exactly what I can do.

I stood right back up and ran up to him once again.

"Sounds like something a scrub would say."

The King of the Night smiled as his fist flew forward. A cross counter, huh? He was deliberately sending me attacks slow enough for me to see. That was pretty ballsy of him.

600%!

I sent my fist into his cheek, and his fist gouged into mine.

And then I was sent flying once more. Maybe I had subconsciously realized the danger of my head being ripped off—I had clutched a hand to my neck without really knowing why.

“Looks like you’re getting serious. How about I go to 800 next?”

I see. He had been a zombie longer than I had, so he probably could exceed human limits by even more. What should I do...? I had hit him with all my strength. And if he could brush that attack off like it was nothing, then my only option was... to show him my power as a masou shoujo.

I charged him one more time, launching a dropkick at him. The King of the Night just slid to the side and dodged.

Boom. I heard an explosive sound and a fist pierced through my abdomen. Then a shock ran through my entire body. I slammed into the window behind me and cracks spiraled out along the glass. When I looked beneath me, a sense of vertigo attacked me. It felt like I was going to fall at any moment.

I slid down to the floor, leaving behind a trail of blood. I spat out blood from my mouth and put a hand on my chainsaw, which had fallen to the floor.

“Nomobuyo, woshi, hashitawa, dokeda, gunmiicha, dei, ribura.”

My clothes flew off and were replaced by the usual costume. However, that didn’t mean my wounds had healed. My stomach was soon dyed in red.

But... I would beat him this time! I continued to attack. Even if he dodged, even if I couldn’t feel my attacks connect, I would continue to attack. When he attacked me, I counterattacked. This was something I had done time and time again with Dai-sensei.

All right! The King of the Night was swinging his fist. I would take the opportunity to-

“Kyah!” Another damn uppercut?!

The King of the Night glanced at Yuu. Yuu’s expression hadn’t

changed, but her eyes were filled with sadness.

Even if I was no match for him, I wouldn't give up.

No matter how many times he beat me back, no matter how many times I was hit on my jaw and off my feet, I would continue attacking.

It felt like I was a person who had never fought in his life going against a boxer.

"That masou shoujo power is quite impressive. All my attacks right now are being fired at 300%, just so you know."

I didn't need the commentary. At that time, I saw him throw a right straight punch at me.

My heartbeat throbbed once, with great strength.

What was happening? It almost felt as if the world was slowing down...

I grit my teeth and let his punch connect with my cheek. But while my cheek was being gouged out... I grabbed his arm.

I got him.

"Eat thiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiisssss~~!!!!"

I raised my right hand high. The King of the Night covered my hand in mist. I tried to bring my fist down on him, but with a *shhmp*, it just disappeared into the mist. He teleported my fist? That power was just unfair!

The King of the Night gave me a bold smile. I had seen that expression time and time again, and that expression pissed me off the most.

Bam. A dull sound echoed through the room.

Blood streamed down from my forehead.

-

But the same went for the King of the Night.

-

“You didn’t expect a headbutt, did you?”

This time, it was my turn to give him a bold smile.

Maybe he was really angry now, but he kicked my stomach with all his might.

I was sent flying and crashed into a pillar so hard that cracks formed on it. I coughed up blood.

My right hand was... in one piece. He could teleport parts of things, but that didn’t mean he could cut them off. I really didn’t understand his ability, but it was a huge nuisance.

“Eucliwood... should not have seen that.”

The King of the Night almost groaned, and the look in his eyes changed.

A chill ran down my spine. It was the same chill I had felt multiple times when facing him.

He was getting serious. The minute I thought that, the viewing platform was filled with mist.

Dai-sensei had said something.

-

“If enough of that mist is around that man, Ayumu-san’s chances of winning drop to zero~~.”

-

This mist didn’t just cover the King of the Night... It covered the entire room.

I didn't know what to do. I could only barely make out the shape of the King of the Night. The lights on the floor let me piece together where the windows were, but that was all. For now, I stood up and readied my chainsaw.

Something suddenly appeared from out of that dark blue mist.

It was a finger. The King of the Night had probably only teleported his finger.

There was no way I could dodge something that had just appeared so close and so suddenly.

I felt like a bullet had just pierced me; my body arched backwards.

He had poked out one of my eyes.

In the next moment, my other eye was also poked out. Then my knees were smashed and I collapsed onto the floor.

What happened after that... Well, how should I put it... It was just a never-ending rain of blows.

If I could actually feel pain... I shuddered at the thought. It didn't seem like he would be satisfied until he broke every bone in my body, almost as if I was made of bubble wrap.

I couldn't even move.

Bam bam bam bam. I was being made into minced meat. Was this impossible...? Could I not beat him...?

“Ayumu!”

Someone was calling me. It was the voice of a girl I had heard time and time again.

“Hiken, Tsubamegaeshi!”

Someone shouted out. It was the name of a skill I had heard time and time again.

I couldn't see my hands in front of my face. Maybe my eyes were recovering too slowly, or maybe the mist was too thick...

Or both, probably. Ahh, my brain just wasn't working right.

"Ayumu! You're here, right?! Ayumu!"

"Hellscythe-dono has been secured! Ayumu, we're escaping!"

The sound of their voices brought me back to reality, even though my mind was on the verge of short-circuiting.

But all I could see in front of me was mist. Where were they...?

"Ukyah!" "Oof!"

I heard a small shriek and the sound of something hitting the floor.

I stood up, but a hard fist slammed into my body.

"Haruna! Sera! Where are you?!"

I wanted to grab and crush his arms with my hands, but his arm was no longer there. If he only teleported his fist, then there was no way I could stop his attacks.

"I'll reunite you all."

I heard the King of the Night's voice from somewhere, and something came flying at me. Two pretty girls.

It was Haruna and Sera. Sera spun in the air and managed to land on her feet, but Haruna slid across the floor and crashed heavily into the wall.

He punched them without mercy... I wouldn't forgive him for that. The King of the Night's loud laughter echoed through the mist-filled room, almost as if he could see me glaring at him. His laughs almost seemed to circle around the donut-shaped room.

"Ahahahahaha! How hilarious!"

I stood in front of Haruna and Sera with my arms open, trying to

protect them. I saw a ruby light shining on the wall in front of me. But, yet again, my body was punched over and over.

“What...? It’s getting through the barrier.”

So the mist could penetrate into the barrier. It seemed like it was pointless to hide behind a wall.

“Ayumu, I’ll buy time. Run away with Hellscythe-dono.”

Sera whispered to me. Run away? Because he was too strong? Or because I was too weak?

I wasn’t able to do anything; I just kept taking punches. Sera seemed unable to watch that any longer, stepping forward with a green sword, but I stopped her.

“Ayumu-“

“Stay back. I... won’t let you interfere.”

“You have quite a lot of endurance. All right, then... Once you lose consciousness, I’ll kill the two behind you. Please try your best, okay?”

Good idea. Because I would never let you beat me down!

Even if my arms were crushed, even if my throat was stabbed through, even if my knees felt like they were smashed...

I would never run away!

I had to protect Yuu! If I didn’t beat him, Yuu would never have faith in me! ...But what should I do?

I crumpled, dropping to my knees, and managed to sit instead. At this rate, Haruna and Sera would... I grit my teeth, and then the mist suddenly lifted. Yuu was shielding me with her body.

“Can’t bear to watch anymore? Good, good. It seems that I really will have to kill your friends if I’m to throw you into despair.”

Clad in his mist, the King of the Night looked down at me and Yuu with his hands in his pockets.

My body began the regeneration process. But even if I healed, it would just end the same way.

My entire body was beaten to a pulp. That must be what it would feel like if you were run over by the bullet train.

It seemed like my training with Dai-sensei had also gone to waste. Even attacking with all my strength didn't yield any results.

I had exhausted all my options. What should I do? Not just to get a hit in, but to beat him...

"Ayumu..." Haruna's sad-looking ahoge watched me.

Haruna... Wait... I see. That was it.

I still wasn't done. I still had some left in me.

I stood up one more time. A strong flame of determination burned within me.

"You don't learn, do you? Haven't you seen that it's pointless no matter what you do?"

I dragged my leg forwards. My leg trembled and I collapsed, but even then I dragged myself along the floor by my hands. If I tried to stand up, I would just stagger and fall down again, but even then I kept moving forward.

"How is it, Eucliwood? Don't you find this situation sorrowful?"

Sera threw her sword from the side. The King of the Night covered his head with mist, and the sword disappeared off to somewhere.

"It's. Useless!"

He looked to his side confidently, and I saw an opening I couldn't let pass.

“Ayumu, don’t overdo it! But... don’t hold backkkkkkkkkkk~~!!!!!!”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaahhh!!”

I opened my right fist and reached out for the King of the Night’s face.

“Hah.” The King of the Night laughed derisively and guarded his face with mist.

I quickly chanted the spell that I had practiced over and over and over. And then... It was time for the final line!

“Shararararaaaann~~!”

A dazzling light flared up and illuminated the room. Kenchinjiru wasn’t the only thing I could make now!

I could also shoot sunlight from my palm!

How do you like that?! Even if you could move physical objects with that mist, you can’t move light, can you?! And if you’re not a masou shoujo, just a zombie, then you won’t be able to defend against this light!

The mist surrounding the King of the Night dispersed. Right. He couldn’t use his ability when there was sunlight!

400%...

I dragged my left leg along and launched a body blow from the left. I pierced through his abdomen and immediately pulled back out.

600%...

I punched him right in the face with my fist. The impact bent his body so far back that it almost went horizontal.

After that... I would hit him with 800% every time!

Right, left, right, left. I wasn’t aiming for anywhere in particular; I

just put my complete heart and soul into my attacks.

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhh!!”

His chest was torn into shreds and a sea of blood gushed out, but I didn’t stop my fists.

Again, and again, and again, and again...

I only managed to stop when Yuu embraced me.

I saw my hands drenched in blood and felt a chill run across my back.

What... What were these dark urges...?

“It’s all right... Yuu, I’m calm now.”

I mumbled those words; it was almost as if I just wanted myself to hear that. Yuu went over to the King of the Night, who had been reduced to a pitiful state, and took his crushed hand into hers.

“Eu... cli... wood...”

The King of the Night called Yuu’s name even as he lay there, coughing up blood. Yuu answered with something, but the King of the Night interrupted her with a plea.

-

“Please... let me die.”

-

Even when he was reduced to that pitiful state, he still couldn’t die.

Yuu closed her eyes, seeming a bit troubled, before looking towards me. Her large blue eyes were filled with determination. And then Yuu looked back to the King of the Night and gave him a firm nod.

...What? What was that? Why did I feel like that? I had defeated my archenemy, but I didn’t feel happy at all.

A feeling of exhaustion filled my body, and I fell to the floor.

“Eucliwood, if I die, could you make me into a penguin Megalo?”

He spoke in a faint, weak voice.

“Ayumu, great job!”

Haruna came over and hugged me.

“I really didn’t think you would be able to win.”

Sera held out her hand. I took it and slowly stood up. The bloodied masou shoujo outfit I was wearing felt very unpleasant.

“I... like penguins.”

I heard the King of the Night laughing. And then... at that time, I heard it. Well, Haruna and Sera probably heard it too.

A voice that seemed to echo directly through my head... Yuu’s kind, beautiful voice.

-

“Yes, I know.”

-

And then, I suddenly realized just what it was that I was feeling.

For some reason... I was jealous.

The moment I saw Yuu take the King of the Night’s hand, I felt an indescribable bitterness. And now that Yuu was doing exactly what he wished, I also felt jealousy.

What a terrible person I was.

Dammit... Here it comes again. This fuzzy feeling in my chest. It was... I see.

I had the heart of a treasure hunter. Yuu was my treasure and I

wanted her, no matter what. Just thinking of Yuu, just thinking about anything that had to do with Yuu, made me frustrated that I couldn't reach her, filled me with childish impatience.

“Ayumu! Are you listening?!”

“Ah, sorry. How did you guys know I was here?”

“Haruna said she felt Ayumu would be here. I was quite skeptical though.”

“I told you! I can see through everything Ayumu does!”

“As expected from Haruna-sensei.”

Hahahaha. I pushed down my feelings for a moment and laughed, but Sera just scowled.

I guess I couldn't hide anything from that girl...

“But still, you did really good!”

“It was all because of you... Haruna.”

“Hueh? A-Ahh... U-uh, hueh? ...R-really?”

Haruna seemed completely at a loss, but in the end, she seemingly decided to accept my showered praise.

When I glanced at the King of the Night, I saw that, like the Megalo, he was turning into white particles.

I guess Yuu really had decided... to kill the King of the Night.

Those white particles... sparkled like stars.

The King of the Night lifted his hand, the hand enveloped by Yuu's gauntlets, and tried to grab some of those glittering stars, but his hand slowly dropped. And then Yuu came over to us with her usual emotionless expression, handing me something that looked like a big, round alarm clock.

Weapon detonator.

So that remote controlled the bombs from afar. It really looked like an alarm clock, though...

“Gimme that for a bit.”

Haruna snatched the clock from Yuu and nodded.

“This makes them explode, and this disarms them!”

She could tell all that by a brief look. She was seriously a genius.

Click. Haruna pushed a button.

“Huh? What?” I didn’t know what was going on, so I couldn’t help but speak up.

“Even if you push the detonate button like this, if you push this thing here...”

You could disarm it? Ah, great.

“...It’s broken.”

“Huh?”

“The disarm button is broken.”

“.....”

“...Ah, this might be bad.”

“Don’t give me that! Of course it’s bad!”

“I-it’s alright! I know where the bombs are!”

Haruna pointed out the window as she said that.

“Around there.”

“Around... Where, exactly?”

“Ugh, shut it! I’ll know when we get there!”

“Over there... That’s where we conservative faction vampire ninjas are fighting with the demons, isn’t it?”

That was pretty far...

Even if I flew there with Haruna in tow, it might take more than five minutes. And it would also take her some time to disarm the bombs.

“Dammit! Sera! Carry Haruna and go on ahead!”

“I understand. Here I go.”

I hit the glass with all my strength and broke it to pieces. Then Sera spread her green wings and flew away.

And I...

“Come on, Yuu!”

I reached out for Yuu, the last person left behind.

Yuu shook her head, but I just continued to hold my hand out to her.

“Are we just going to leave Haruna and Sera by themselves?”

No, we will not.

Yuu gave one last glance at the place where the King of the Night was, and then she grabbed onto me.

I leapt out the window and flew up into the air. Sera was already just a speck in the distance. She was way too fast.

At this rate, everything might already be finished by the time I got there.

How was it?

Yuu showed me a memo. As always, she held a ballpoint pen, but I never saw her write anything.

“How was what?”

Not having me around made everything more peaceful, didn't it?

I see. That was what she meant. We searched high and low for the Megalo and fake Megalo but never found them, and that was probably because Yuu had left us. Our destinies became those of normal people.

Normal, charming destinies. Lives where you might bump into a friend at the department store, see them in an unexpected light, and call that the most exciting thing that had happened to you.

“Yeah, it was peaceful. But there was something missing.”

Liar.

“It's not a lie. I mean... You weren't there, right? That's when I realized that Eucliwood Hellscythe is a girl who's as stubborn as the masou shoujo, that she gives off the impression that she can do anything and yet acts like a normal person, that she can't show emotions and yet gets depressed really easily, And that she's a glutton and a hopeless idiot.”

I see.

“No matter where I am, I won't ever find anybody else like you.”

Yuu looked lonely, dropping her gaze.

-

“That's why... it has to be *you*. I have to have *you* by my side.”

Part 11

Yuu's breath caught in her chest. I faced those blue eyes of hers and smiled.

"Yuu, no matter what destiny awaits me... I'll handle it. So please stay with me."

I heard those words once before.

"Ah, that's true... But I was weak back then. I just said that to sound confident. But this is different-I'll definitely figure things out. Please believe me."

I believe you. Even so, I would be a bother.

Still no good? I got strong enough to even beat the King of the Night... and still...

"Shut up! I told you, just stay with me!"

When Yuu heard me suddenly lose my cool, her eyes widened. And then she gave me a small smile.

That sounded like Haruna.

"We had to deal with so much because of you, so let me be selfish. Yes, this is just my own ego talking, and I'm not thinking about how you feel. But I'm not going to give up."

That really sounded like Haruna.

"The King of the Night said something. He thought that living is more painful than dying. I could almost believe that, but in the end, I think he was wrong."

I think he was right.

"But life is definitely much more fun than death. You know that

too, don't you?"

Yes. I know. You all have shown me that.

Yuu gave me a strong nod.

But even then. I can't make everyone unhappy.

Ugh, dammit! I hugged Yuu tight.

This hurts.

"I'm definitely not letting go of you again. You're a treasure I've finally gotten my hands on, after all."

Ayumu.

"It doesn't matter how much you cry or how much you struggle; until you promise to be by my side, I definitely won't let you go. Haruna and Sera... They both feel the same way.

Everyone is being selfish.

"Yeah, exactly! We're all being selfish! And we're going to push our selfishness on you! There are lots and lots of things we want you to do for us!"

I got it.

"No, you don't!"

"I got it."

"Eh?"

In my absolute surprise, I almost let go of Yuu. Yuu had used words.

-

"No matter what happens, I'll stay by Ayumu's side."

-

At that moment, Yuu was not her usual emotionless self. Instead, she gave me a smile so beautiful that it could have belonged to a goddess. Just seeing that smile... made tears come to my eyes.



“Now that sounds like a great idea.”

I laughed while tears streamed down my face, and Yuu thrust another memo at me.

In return, you will be unhappy.

“Ahh, that also sounds like a great idea.”

My head hurts.

“Sorry about that. Oh yeah, your words all definitely become reality, don’t they?”

I will do something about Ayumu’s unhappiness.

In return, I want Ayumu to do something about me. About my destiny.

Is that selfish?

“Yeah, it’s selfish. Like Haruna.”

Ayumu.

“Hm?”

I want you to hug me again. Hug me tight.

I couldn’t see the memo too well through my tears, but I hugged Yuu tightly, so tight that our cheeks rubbed against each other.

I was probably waiting. Waiting for this selfishness.

Perhaps we were holding each other too close, but Yuu let go of her memo pad and wrapped her arms around me.

And, like a paper blizzard, the scattered pages flew off in the wind.

Whoever picked those memos up... I’m sure they would blush when they read them.

Part 12

By the time I landed, only Haruna was there.

“Where’s Sera?”

“There wasn’t enough time to disarm them.”

Haruna pointed at the sky. Don’t tell me that Sera was trying the strategy I’d used!

“If I could only use a lightning spell...”

“Haruna, what did you say just now?”

“It’s one way to disarm the bombs. You hit the circuit with electricity.”

“And you told Sera that?”

“Hueh? Yeah... If the attack fails then the bomb’s gonna explode, but the barrier spell around that bomb is weak against electricity.”

I looked up at the sky.

I see. Certainly Sera could use lightning attacks.

And then...

-

“Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust!”

-

I heard a voice from above. And then the cry of thunder.

Nooooooooooo!! Stop itttttttt!! Even though I came up with that

name, hearing it is so damn embarrassing, so don't scream it like thatttttt!!

I was happy that she had used the name I suggested, but hearing it screamed was really embarrassing. What was I feeling right now? I held my face in both hands and shook my head from side to side.

“Ayumu, what are you doing?”

Haruna, who was watching, began to bug me.

“No, I'm just embarrassed...”

“That getup makes it all the more embarrassing!”

I turned around at that familiar voice and saw Tomonori standing there.

The clouds cleared. Along with the moonlight streaming down came the sight of descending green wings.

That beautiful sight almost looked like a...

“An angel.”

Someone mumbled that somewhere.

Everyone there, the masou shoujo, the Megalo, the vampire ninjas... Everyone was staring up at Sera.

Or, rather, they were entranced by her.

Even Haruna and I, who saw Sera on a daily basis, were dazzled.

Yuu lifted one of her gauntleted arms into the air. With that gesture, all the Megalo flew into the sky as one.

People came back to themselves and began to follow them, but...

“We don't need to chase them!”

“Let's just leave them be~~.”

A commanding voice and a carefree voice sounded at almost the same time, and the vampire ninjas and masou shoujo just glared at the Megalo while they flew away.

“We’re retreating~~.”

The carefree voice echoed through the air, and then the masou shoujo turned into sparkling light.

The vampire ninjas pointed their weapons at the retreating masou shoujo.

“Stop it.”

But the commanding voice stopped them. It was the voice of a woman with a confident, arrogant expression.

“Who were those people? They were... much stronger than we are.”

It was Saras, a vampire ninja who went to the same school that I did. She seemed to be the commanding officer in charge of this area. I might be linked to this girl by fate.

“Why are you asking me?”

“You’re wearing the same outfit as they did.”

Please stop looking at me like I’m garbage...

“Just like you all... they’re, uhh... demon extermination specialists.”

“You think you can just explain it away with a joke like that...? Well, all right then... Seraphim!”

Sera had landed, but Saras didn’t even look at her and called out.

“It’s the traitor...” “She has some nerve showing her face here...”

I heard unpleasant whispers all around me, but Saras dropped her water sword and, as she faced Sera, fell to her knees with her hand on the ground. Her long hair flew in all directions.

“I thank you. You saved us.”

The commanding officer had fallen to her knees. Tomonori saw that and let out a huge smile.

“Seraphim... Seriously, thanks a lot!”

Tomonori gave Sera a thumbs up and then also fell to her knees.

That was probably the way vampire ninjas showed respect.

The other vampire ninjas seemed a bit bewildered, but one after another after another... all the vampire ninjas fell to their knees.

The person most surprised to see that was Sera.

“Please don’t bow! I was the one who defied the laws of vampire ninjas-“

Saras stood up straight, watching Sera with cool eyes.

“Don’t misunderstand! I’m not kneeling for a vampire ninja. I’m kneeling for the angel who saved my life!”

“I never thought that you would also be a tsundere.”

“Shut the hell up! Do you want to die?! Everyone, retreat! Quickly!”

The vampire ninjas scattered like baby spiders.

“See ya, Aikawa!”

Tomonori was waving at me furiously and I waved back. Then Tomonori also ran off.

“Seraphim, there is one last thing I wanted to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“Why did you save us? There were people here who counted you among tonight’s targets.”

“I wouldn’t expect such a foolish question from you. It’s because

they're my comrades."

"It's not a foolish question. If I had asked you that question before, you would have said that it was because protecting the people is what the law requires of vampire ninjas."

"Is that so...?"

"Yeah, it is. I have to say, I feel a bit jealous of you. Before your mission, before the law, you can act for the sake of your friends..."

After saying that, Saras suddenly looked at me.

"You're mocking me, aren't you?"

"Nah, I was just thinking that, surprisingly, Saras can also be pretty cute."

A water shuriken sunk into me.

"I don't want to hear my nickname coming out of your mouth!"

Ahh, tsunderes hurt. Oogh, please don't twist it.

"So what should I call you, then? What name do you use at school?"

Saras gave me an angry look, her cheeks flushing slightly.

"My name is Hoshikawa... Kirara."

"Kirara?! That's so cute! Are you a manga artist or something?!"

"Hey! I told you not to mock me! I'll kill you! Right now! Everyone! Stop the retreat! Our priorities have changed!"

Hey, hey, don't tell me... Were all the vampire ninjas here were going to attack me?

...Well, crap.

END CHAPTER 4

Epilogue – Thirty-siiiix~~. Thirty-seveeeeen~~.



Part 1

To make up for lost time, I was enjoying myself on a date with Yuu.

We went to the same planetarium I'd seen with Tomonori, we ate at the maid café, and then we went to the department store to buy clothes.

The lavender one or the black one. Which one is better?

“Hm? Let me see... Lavender, maybe?”

I also like the lavender one better.

What a coincidence. Ahh... What was this warm feeling in my

chest?

“You know, the places we went to today are all places I went to when you weren’t here.”

I see. This was really fun.

“Yeah, it’s fun now too. Where were you and what were you doing?”

I was in the Underworld.

“Didn’t you have anywhere else you could go? Like, another country or something.”

No matter where I went, I would cause trouble. So there was nowhere I belonged.

“A place where you belong, huh...? I hope that here... by my side... I hope that you will come to think of that as the place you belong.”

I tried to forget about Ayumu and everyone else. I desperately tried my best. But I couldn’t; no matter what I did, I would start to think, *Haruna would do this*, or *Ayumu would do that*. I couldn’t throw away the small piece of happiness that I had found.

“And that’s why you came all the way back to my house?”

That was because the tea in the Underworld was terrible.

During our date, Yuu was constantly looking over her shoulder.

Small wonder, that; Haruna and Sera were following us on this date as well.

“Hey, hey! Isn’t this one really really cute?!”

“Yes. It would fit Haruna well. You should match it with this one.”

“Ohh! That’s a great idea!”

They really seemed to be having fun... It was almost as if they had

just come here to play.

Perhaps Yuu just couldn't take it anymore, but she turned around to look at them.

“Ah, we got figured out.”

Haruna's ahoge stood straight on end. Yes. In fact, you were completely, utterly figured out. Yuu reached out her hand and beckoned them over. Sera and Haruna looked at each other, and then they ran over. Geez, those two...

Well, it was true, though.

It was more fun with the four of us together.

Part 2

It had been quite a while since all four of us enjoyed shopping together, and after we went home, we sat around our table. Haruna was on my right, Sera was across from me, and Yuu was on my left.

In the end, this battle formation was invincible. If anyone was missing, it wouldn't work.

Yuu, like always, was drinking from a teacup as she watched a variety show on our plasma television. And nobody pestered her about anything.

She had come back, so everything was fine. We could find small pieces of happiness like this, so everything was fine.

Everyone in the room probably felt the same way.

With all four of us assembled like this, the fuzzy feeling in my chest had stopped coming. It had been a while... A while since I'd felt so refreshed.

In the middle of all that, Haruna was mumbling something with her arms crossed.

She was probably thinking of something. I felt like at a time like this, I should probably just ignore her.

"You know, I thought of something!"

Sigh. It didn't matter whether I paid attention to her or not; the end result would be the same. "What is it?" I asked with another sigh.

"People who do selfish things have to be punished!"

As she said that, Haruna pointed to Yuu.

"You have to play a penalty game!"

“Hey, hey, she came back to us, so it’s not like-“

I don’t mind.

Yuu’s eyes were filled with resolve. Sera uncrossed her arms and clapped her hands once.

“How about, for a day, Eucliwood-dono wears the disgusting outfit that Ayumu always wears?”

“I don’t think that would really be a punishment, but that could work... Ah, wait. I have an idea. Wait just a second.”

The three others gave me suspicious looks as I took out my cell phone and dialed a number.

“Hey, what’s up?”

“Sorry, but there’s something I want you to bring over.”

“Something you want me to bring over?”

“Yeah, it’s that thing you mentioned before...”

Part 3

Twenty minutes later, the person on the other line of the call arrived.

“Hello. Yuu-chan, it’s been a while~~. You’re looking cute as always. Let me pat your head a bit...”

The spiky-haired boy, who had wedged himself in between me and Yuu, started to make a pass at her.

I grabbed onto a corner of Orito’s hair with the intention of pulling it out.

“If you touch her then I’ll make you into a zombie. So, did you bring what I asked for?”

“I brought it!”

Orito reached into a bulging paper bag and took out a paired maid uniform and headband.

Indeed. Back in cooking class, that guy told me that he had gotten a maid uniform.

If we had to play a penalty game, then we really should make use of that.

“I just thought of something.” Sera had an almost Zen-like expression as she raised her hand.

“What is it?”

“Didn’t Ayumu also act selfishly?”

“If you want to go there, then isn’t Sera guilty too?”

“Well then, you all have to do a penalty game too.”

“Hey, wait a second. Haruna, you’re always acting selfish too, aren’t you?”

“Huh? No, I’ve been good!”

“You haven’t been good at all!”

“I thought something like this might happen, so I brought enough for everyone.”

So the paper bag bulged because he had put four maid outfits in there...

“Why the hell do you have one for me too?”

My mouth twitched in annoyance as Orito handed me a maid outfit.

“O-oh, also, Yuu. Sera’s actually really good at the violin. Sera, could you bring it down here?”

“Understood. I’ll grab it while I’m changing.”

I’m excited.

Yuu clapped. Crap. At the rate things were going, I might have to wear a maid outfit again. All right then... In that case, I’d unleash my sealed guitar powers!

“Yuu, wait just a bit!”

I went down to my dad’s study on the first floor and picked up my dad’s dust-covered folk guitar.

How nostalgic. Back in the day, I had desperately practiced the guitar so I would be popular with the ladies. All right, it was time for me to put that forbidden part of my history on display!

I went back to the living room and I excitedly strummed the guitar strings.

“Well then, listen to this slow number!”

Haruna watched me in blank amazement. Yuu seemed slightly

interested.

“One~~~. Twoooo~~. Threeeee~. Fourrrrr~.”

They listened to my *slow numbers*. Gyahahaha! How’s that?!

“.....”

Huh~~? Even Orito was shaking his head with compassion and mouthing, “No, this is terrible” as I sang.

“Seventeeeen~~. Eighteeeen~~.”

Why?

“Thirty-siiiix~~. Thirty-seveeeen~~.”

Why wasn’t anyone trying to stop me?

“All right, well, I’m going to go change. Ayumu, you hurry up and change too.”

All right... I’ll change.

Umm... Well, kinda like that, we all changed into maid outfits and began a strange concert. It made me think back to Tanabata. Back then, everyone had a ponytail.

Orito took a ton of photos and then he went home. I’d return the maid outfits some later day.

Orito had gotten these outfits for Yuu and Sera in the first place, so he happily lent them to us. We cleaned up the table, turned off the television, and readied our instruments.

“So, what should we play?”

Sera was wearing a maid outfit that highlighted her bulging breasts all too well, and she set her violin on her shoulder.

I couldn’t help but smile at the sight of a maid with a violin. I sat down and began to tune my guitar.

“Naturally, we have to play Eine Kleine Nachtmusik!”

Haruna had a maid outfit on that was close to a Gothic Lolita costume, and she struck a daunting pose with her keyboard harmonica.

“Don’t be ridiculous. How do you expect me to play that with a folk guitar?”

Yuu was standing up straight next to me. Out of her usual outfit, only her gauntlets remained, but, strangely... it felt like nothing had changed at all.

“The gloomy necromancer is using castanets?”

Yuu, who had castanets in both her hands, nodded.

“Well, how about my original, ‘Polyester of the Yayoi Period?’”⁶⁶

“Do you really think I would be able to play an original by you... And now the song’s gone past the Jomon period?!”

“All right, how about Nakamura Mondo’s theme?”⁶⁷

“I have no idea... You really like your period dramas, don’t you?”

What kind of song is Haruna’s original piece?

“It goes something like this.”

Haruna began to play her keyboard harmonica.

Oh? That sounded pretty nice.

It was a jazzy melody that just soothed the soul.

“Quite nice. Well then, how about we use that as a base and just add in what we want?”

“I see. That sounds fun.”

All right, then I’d add a little folk rocky feel. Just thinking about it got me excited.

All right. Here I go.

Yuu's castanets added a dramatic quality to the music. And when Sera's violin joined in, the song became quite pleasant. And then there was Haruna's keyboard harmonica.

I smiled as I joined the beautiful harmony that these three geniuses had started, but I couldn't get it to sound as folk rocky as I wanted.

All right, then.

“Kontree rhoooo~~~ Taik me hoooo~~~”⁶⁸

“Wait wait wait wait! Stop, stop! Ayumu, your singing is disgusting!”

“What did you say?!”

“No, his singing isn't disgusting. Ayumu himself is disgusting.”

I can at least appreciate that his singing is not in Japanese.

We regrouped and started again. Yuu made the rhythm, and Sera formed the base of the music. Then Haruna's keyboard harmonica chimed in too.

“Ai berooonnn~~! Weh, Vajinnyaaaa-“

“I told you not to sing!”

“Let's just play without Ayumu.”

But his singing is more or less fine.

I had no other choice, so I just hummed my song inside my head and we all played our instruments together.

I wonder why we were so in tune with each other, even though this was the first time we had played together?

I'm sorry.

Once we had finished playing one entire song, Yuu showed me a

memo.

“Hm? Why?”

That was really fun.

Her gauntleted hand reached out. Hmm? Something behind me?

When I turned around, I saw, standing behind me... an old man with an impressive beard. He was an overly-muscular old man clad in a black suit and a hat. He carried a walking stick.

W-who the hell was that?! Why did he come in without knocking?!

“Genkunrou-sama!”

Sera hurriedly materialized her black cloak, and as soon as she had slipped it over her maid outfit, she fell to one knee.

If that old man with a tremendous sense of presence was a vampire ninja, then it wasn't surprising that he managed to sneak into my house without permission.

“Did you... come to punish me?”

The man turned his eyes to look at Sera and his mouth moved under his huge beard. Even with a glance, you could tell this man had a sense of dignity about him.

“Quite the opposite. Saras-chan asked me to come.”

That man was absurdly direct!

“Saras?”

“Yes. She told me to forgive Seraphim-chan, and so I... came here.”

The man, who was still holding onto his walking stick, made a peace sign with his wrinkled hand. Haruna went over and began to pull on his soft-looking beard.

“Haruna! What do you think you're doing?!”

Sera pulled her off right away and prostrated herself.

“Is this guy important?”

“Ugh. Ayumu should also stop being so rude. Just looking at you disgusts me.”

“Kakaka. I don’t mind. Anyways, Seraphim’s crime has been cleared.”

That’s great. I see, so Saras wanted to pay Sera back? Thanks to her, Sera’s life was now no longer in danger. Great, gre-

“Hey, hey, at times like this, shouldn’t you put her through some tough test or something?”

Hey, Haruna, what the hell are you saying?

“Hm, that’s true. I also thought that something was missing...”

Seriously...? Don’t tell me...

“Well then, Seraphim will be subjected to a test. Yes... I’ll give her a test.”

Ugh, we’d finally settled everything... And then, because of Haruna, things had taken a turn down a bad road.

“I understand. I will humbly accept your test.”

Sera put her forehead to the floor. Come on, you fight this a bit too. Geez... how did things suddenly start to go this way...?

“But, you know... I just thought of a great test for her!”

Haruna spoke even as she was having fun braiding Genkunrou-sama’s beard.

“You know Dai-sensei’s magical bombs? There are still some left.”

“There are still some left? So... you want her to find the last one...”

“Nope, not one. Four.”

“Four?! There are still four left?!”

“And you want me to find those?”

“Well, certainly, Sera can take care of them if she uses her Dragon Fang Thunder God Thrust technique.”

I accidentally said the name that I had come up with, and that was embarrassing enough to make me cover my face with my hands.

“Don’t worry! Ayumu’s the one who’s gonna do it!”

Me?! Since when was I the one who needed to be given a test?!

“Bombs! That’s not good. That’s not peaceful at all. Well, perhaps I’ll also ask you to do something while you’re at it.”

Hahahaha.

Kakakaka.

Haruna and Genkunrou both burst into laughter.

And like that... a new sea of troubles washed over us.

END CHAPTER 4

END VOLUME 4

Tomonori: So my recommended recipe is...

Ayumu: You're going to use dressing, aren't you?

Tomonori: Bean sprouts sauteed with oyster sauce!

Ayumu: Oh? That sounds surprisingly normal.

Tomonori: The ingredients are bean sprouts and bacon, sesame oil and oyster sauce. And salt and pepper!

Ayumu: You're not putting dressing in?

Tomonori: The cooking is also simple! You just have to sautee it at high heat! Adding egg in is pretty nice too!

Ayumu: Wow. Tomonori is beginning to look like a good housewife.

Tomonori: Don't call me Tomonori! Alright, finished! Time for a taste test!

Ayumu: ... Am I the one tasting it?

Tomonori: Why else would you be here~~?

Ayumu: ... Well, I guess I could. Let's see... oh? It's not bad at all.

Tomonori: Now Aikawa has become a bean sprout kid! (1)

Ayumu: Don't tack on any negative images...

Tomonori: Bean sprout has the word "sprout" in it, doesn't it? So being a bean sprout kid is pretty amazing!

Ayumu: N-Now that you mention it... I do strangely want to sprout all of a sudden...

Tomonori: Right?! Bean sprout kids are our future!

Ayumu: On second thought, taking it that far is really...



(1) Bean sprout kid actually is a Japanese noun that means frail or weak child.

Is
this
delicious?

Haruna: If you want a recipe suggestion, leave it up to me!

Ayumu: A recipe from Haruna. I'm pretty excited.

Haruna: First, you take your catch and knock it unconscious. It's gotta look like it's dead!

Ayumu: Ah, so you don't kill it. You want to keep it fresh.

Haruna: Then you bury it in the ground.

Ayumu: Oh, so like a preserved egg? Also, what's the ingredient here?

Haruna: Once it wakes up, you confuse it and then it's time for mind control!

Ayumu: Mind... control?

Haruna: Phew~. Looks like it's done!

Ayumu: ... What is?

Haruna: A zombie.

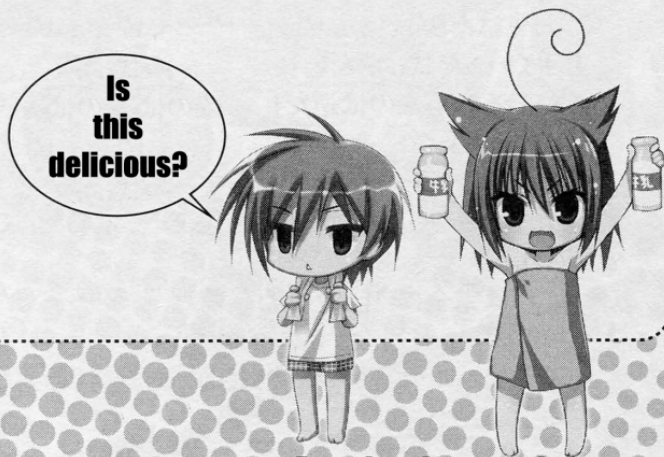
Ayumu: I didn't ask you for a zombie recipe!

Haruna: Then what kind of recipe did you want to know?!

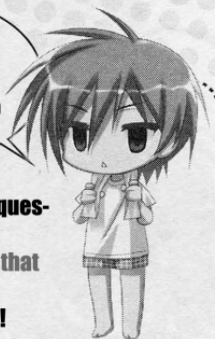
Ayumu: There are plenty... like you could give me a stew recipe.

Haruna: Stew... zombie stew?

Ayumu: I'll pass!



Is
this
delicious?



Sera: Recipe recommendation? What a wonderful question and a wonderful project.

Ayumu: To think you of all people would show up in that project though...

Sera: Please allow me to explain the ingredient list!

Ayumu: You're way more excited than you usually are...

Sera: First, you take something that looks really close to a fish, and then some alkyl hydroxyl sulfo-

Ayumu: Wait wait wait! Just wait a second! Don't put surface-active chemicals in there!

Sera: Exactly what other type of seasoning are you telling me to use?

Ayumu: Use actual seasoning!

Sera: Well, there's no helping it. Anyways, first we chop off the fish's head, pretending it was Ayumu.

Ayumu: You added something at the end there...

Sera: We fillet the fish, pretending it's Ayumu, and then we cut Ayumu up with a grater, pretending he's a daikon.

Ayumu: Why am I always in each step?!

Sera: Next, you form a stamper pattern on the metal mold and begin the pressing process.

Ayumu: Why did the recipe suddenly start sounding like we're making CDs?!

Sera: So what do you want me to do? How frustrating... it's hard to get any cooking done with Ayumu around.

Ayumu: Maybe you should actually *cook* then!



Afterword

Good news and cats arrive without warning.

I was eating some takoyaki and cold noodles and about to put in some eyedrops when I heard the phone ring. The caller ID told me that the call was coming from Fujimi Books.

Was my manager going to yell at poor inexperienced me again like some demon from hell? I nervously picked up the phone.

“Ah, hello.”

“Hello. I wanted to talk to you a bit about the wrapper on the third volume...”

The wrapper on the third volume... now that I thought about it, I had suggested that we put on the phrase “Should I suuuuck your bloooooo~~?” or something⁶⁹.

I guess that idea got rejected. I admit, it was a bit of a weird reference. Expecting the worst, I braced myself for death and asked my manager to continue. And then...

“What about an announcement for a drama CD?”

“Ah, I see..... Huh?”

“Eh?”

“A drama CD?”

“Yes, a drama CD.”

His voice was that of an angel come to heal my soul. Who could have ever thought this person was a demon?! My manager was a healer! A healing demon!

“Seriously?! Eh? W-W-Wow!”

“..... I regret telling you now.”

My healing angel (demon) said something annoying.

“No no, that’s something you have to tell the author, right?!”

“Anyways, I just wanted to ask... would you have any seiyuu⁷⁰ in mind?”

Seiyuu... what a sweet ring that had to it. And they even asked the author for his opinion on things like this?!

I would have never thought that I would ever be having a conversation like this, so I hadn’t thought about it at all. And the fact that I had come this far was all because of the people who bought my work.

I was just overflowing with joy, but I couldn’t tell him what seiyuu to use.

Well, when I decided to go into this business, I did play around with the idea of this happening in my head, but now that the time had actually come, I was just at a loss.

At that point, I asked a friend I had known before I had submitted “Kore wa Zombie Desu ka?” for publication.

“If I had to assign seiyuu to the characters, who should I choose?”

“Seiyuu, huh...? Ayumu is Kimura Takuya, Haruna is Baishou Chieko. Yuu is Miwa-“

“Why are they all from Howl’s Moving Castle?!”

“They’re all connected with Kimura. He’s so good, Kimutaku is...”⁷¹

“Definitely not! Not as a seiyuu!”

“Well then, Ayumu is Ogata Megumi. Haruna is Tange Sakura. Yuu is Iwao Junko. Sera is Yukana. Tomonori is Teduka Chiharu. Dai-sensei is Ikezawa Haruna.”

“Melly Lancer?! How the hell am I supposed to get all those people together?! If those seiyuu got together and did another work, I’d sure as hell like a bluray of it!”

Dammit! This guy is useless! ... Right! Maybe I should ask for a girl’s opinion... and with that, I asked another friend of mine for her advice on who I should use.

“Eh? Seiyuu for Korezombie? Ayumu should be Sugita Tomokazu-san. Haruna should be Suzumura Kenichi-san. Yuu should be Ishida Akira-san... ah, also use Nakamura Yuuichi-san!”

N-No good... this girl was a complete fujoshi.⁷² Why were they all male?!

Anyways, like that, I went around and asked a lot of people for advice, and I ended up going to Fujimi Books. I had a meeting with the head editor of Fantasia Books, and although I was truly grateful that they were turning my work into a drama CD, my body was completely stiff.

This head editor had the dignity of Char Aznable from Gundam. You could say that everything he said sunk right into my very bones, but suffice to say that no matter how many times I met with him, I always felt really humbled in his presence. He was the man standing above the healing demon... he might be the true “demon” in this situation.

I was still unsure about who I wanted as seiyuu for the drama CD. I thought that maybe I would just leave it up to them, but then suddenly... I asked the head editor who I should pick.

And in a nice voice that almost reminded me of Quattro Bajeena⁷³ giving one of his ferocious speeches...

“Berryz Workshop.”⁷⁴

B-B-B-B-B-B-B-Berryz Workshop?! To think I would hear those words come out of the head editor’s mouth at Fantasia Books! Well, suddenly I felt I had gotten much closer to this man.

... It really seemed that demons don’t exist in this world.

-

And in the end, to everyone who bought this book, and to Kobaichi-san and Muririn-san who always work so hard... And to Broccoli-sama who made Mon Colle cards out of Korezon, and to my manager Morioka-san...

I thank you from the very bottom of my heart. Please continue to support me in the future!

- August 2009, Kimura Shinichi

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Translation Notes

1 He actually starts talking in Kansai-ben, but of course this is impossible to put into English.

2 A clear reference to anpanman (anpan is a type of dessert consisting of bread filled with red bean paste), which was a popular old anime. The line about love and courage is from his theme song.

3 The phrase is erogappa, which literally means “perverted kappa,” since apparently kappas are perverted (at least this is the joke). But here it’s been modified for more effect.

4 I figure it’s been long enough so footnoting this again isn’t bad. Masou is a play on words on mahou (magic), and the sou literally means “clothes,” so this translates roughly to magical clothing girl. Renki is also not really a Japanese word, but the “ren” is written with the kanji that roughly means metal, so Renki translates roughly to “metallic weapon.” These are all words created for the sake of this light novel.

5 A shoehorn is a tool used to help people put on shoes.

6 The verb Orito uses, “mi ni tsukeru,” actually has the additional meaning of “wearing” something like clothes. So there is an extra tone of perversion here that is difficult to translate into the English.

7 Some weapon or something that I’ve never heard of.

8 Onigiri are just rice balls, sometimes flavored with various meats and veggies.

9 Both baseball teams.

10 He says “You write it as ‘honki’ and read it as ‘maji?’” Both those words mean “serious.” There is a peculiarity in Japanese text when you can write one word but force the reader to pronounce it differently. This in particular is a reference to an old Japanese manga series that used this peculiarity. In this case, it is just meant

to emphasize the word “serious,” so that’s how I translated it, but I thought I would just mention the implicit, rather obscure reference.

11 A card game where players have to match the front and back halves of poems.

12 Shimo is written with the kanji for “under,” while mura and son are both valid ways to pronounce the second character in his name.

13 He actually writes out “basukettobouru” with kanji that all have some sort of violent meaning. For example, “ba” is written with the kanji for “blade” and “ketto” with the kanji for “spitting out blood.”

14 For those who forgot, Yuki-chan refers to Tomonori.

15 A form of traditional Japanese drama that I won’t get too much into detail on.

16 Game series by Square, which does have Maelstrom as an attack.

17 Fictional planet in Dragonball.

18 In Japanese mythology, Altair and Vega are supposed to represent two separated lovers, Orihime and Hikoboshi. This story is also the foundation of the Japanese holiday Tanabata.

19 Used in some Sega commercials around the time of the Mega Drive/Gensis and in the start-up logo to some games. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0y6hIABR-nU>

20 A television brand, although I think it’s been discontinued.

21 Planet in the anime Space Battleship Yamato.

22 A Street Fighter reference. Shadaloo is the evil organization’s name in the game, and at one point one of its commanders was named Vega. (He’s known as M. Bison outside of Japan due to a three-way name switch.)

23 There are jelly-like snacks in Japan that act like energy drinks. This is probably a reference to those snacks.

24 No octopi actually involved here. They are just small hot dogs cooked and cut into an octopus shape.

25 Literal translation would be “Give! Give! Gibu’s Army!” Where the last exclamation is a reference to a supposedly famous war strategy. I decided to go with a localization.

26 A rather obsolete term for octopus.

27 Double Agility stat when worn. Sometimes translated as “Starry Bracelet” instead in some of the earlier games due to character limits.

28 Dragonball character.

29 King of the Night is “Yoru no Ou.”

30 A spell from Magical Circle Guru Guru, a pretty old manga. Can only be used by someone in the Hero class.

31 Dragonball reference.

32 Japanese baseball player. Probably the most famous Japanese baseball player ever.

33 Pork soup. I left it in Japanese so the following puns would actually make sense. Tonjiru (which shows up a bit later) also means pork soup.

34 Vegetable and tofu soup.

35 I decided not to localize this. Chauchau is just slang for a dog, while “chaunchau” means “It’s wrong, isn’t it?” in Kansai dialect.

36 One of the most famous and expensive wine-producing vineyards in the world.

37 These are all Japanese parodies of famous pieces. “Monkey Gorilla Chimpanzee” is a parody of the Colonel Bogey March, while “The Demon’s Underwear” is a parody of Funiculi Funicula.

38 This is a reference to a song. The song’s title is actually

“Passionate Continent” (情熱大陸 - you can see a performance [here](#)). Haruna changed the name, leading to this situation.

39 A reference to a Japanese television program.

40 Old American sitcom. Feel free to youtube the opening if you want to know exactly what line he’s referencing here.

41 A crime drama TV serial.

42 The Jomon Period is a ancient period in Japanese history. Considering they were known for their pottery, it would be strange if they had polyester.

43 Literally, “he responded seriously?!” The implication being that she was joking a bit but got responded to as if it weren’t a joke. That’s what double sarcasm precisely is, although I’m not sure if it’s too much of a common term.

44 Really old Hanna-Barbera cartoon.

45 A reference to Oishinbo, a rather old manga. Unabara-sensei (actually, his name is Kaibara-sensei but it probably was changed here for copyright reasons) and his son are rivals.

46 Anata no soba ni also means “to your side,” whereas “soba” sounds like “saba”... so Haruna is making a really random pun here.

47 Dokidoki Survival is a Prince of Tennis dating sim. The “ni” in niichan is written with the kanji for “boil,” although niichan also means brother. Survival is “sabaibaru,” and “saba” means mackerel.

48 The World’s Nabeatsu is the stage name of a comedic actor, who was also part of the comedic duo team “Jarism.” His real name is Watanabe Atsumu.

49 And I am not that guy.

50 A line from Slam Dunk.

51 Final Fantasy V reference.

52 Written with the same gloomy that Haruna uses to call Yuu.

53 Reference to a Japanese cosmetics company. This is the last line in a commercial of the company and I guess became fairly meme-ish. Ayumu just uses it as an exclamation of enjoyment.

54 I don't think this has come up in this novel yet, but senpai is just a word for senior student and kouhai for junior student. But they carry a lot more cultural significance than that simple definition so I left them as is.

55 I think this is a reference to Dragon Quest III, and is a parody of Eginbear Castle.

56 The technical English term for this family is Enoploteuthidae. The Japanese term for this taxonomic family actually translates roughly to "pseudo-firefly-squids," which makes it a bit more punny.

57 Fry-gaeshi is actually the Japanese word for spatula.

58 Signature attack of the Valkyrie Profile valkyries. "Divine Assault" is the lead-in used by Lenneth from the first game.

59 Taken from an attack by the same name used by Grungust, of the Super Robot Wars series.

60 Also is the girl from the Ring horror movies. The song Haruna is referring to, 'feels like HEAVEN,' isn't actually that

61 Here you go: [Click me!](#)

62 There's a very untranslatable pun going on in all this. Bear is "kuma" while devil or demon is "akuma." So when Haruna says "ah, kuma," there is a pun. For instance, "Ah, white bear" is very close to "white demon." It's the difference between "Ah, shiroi kuma" and "Shiroi akuma."

63 Reference to the anime Inuyasha.

64 He actually uses the tsuchinoko, a fictitious snake creature.

65 Dragonball reference.

66 In an earlier chapter, Haruna claimed to have written a piece entitled “Polyester of the Jomon Period.” The Yayoi period is another period in premodern Japanese history, and occurred after the Jomon period.

67 A character from a period drama, the Hissatsu series.

68 In case you were wondering, yes. He’s trying to sing Take Me Home, Country Roads.

69 A reference to some commercial for medicine where a comedian dresses up as a mosquito repeats this line.

70 Voice actress.

71 Kimutaku is the nickname of Kimura Takuya, an actor/singer.

72 Common name given to women otaku, especially those who are into the yaoi culture.

73 One of Char Aznable’s aliases.

74 A Japanese pop group, currently consisting of seven girls.